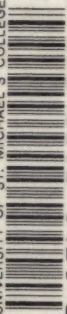


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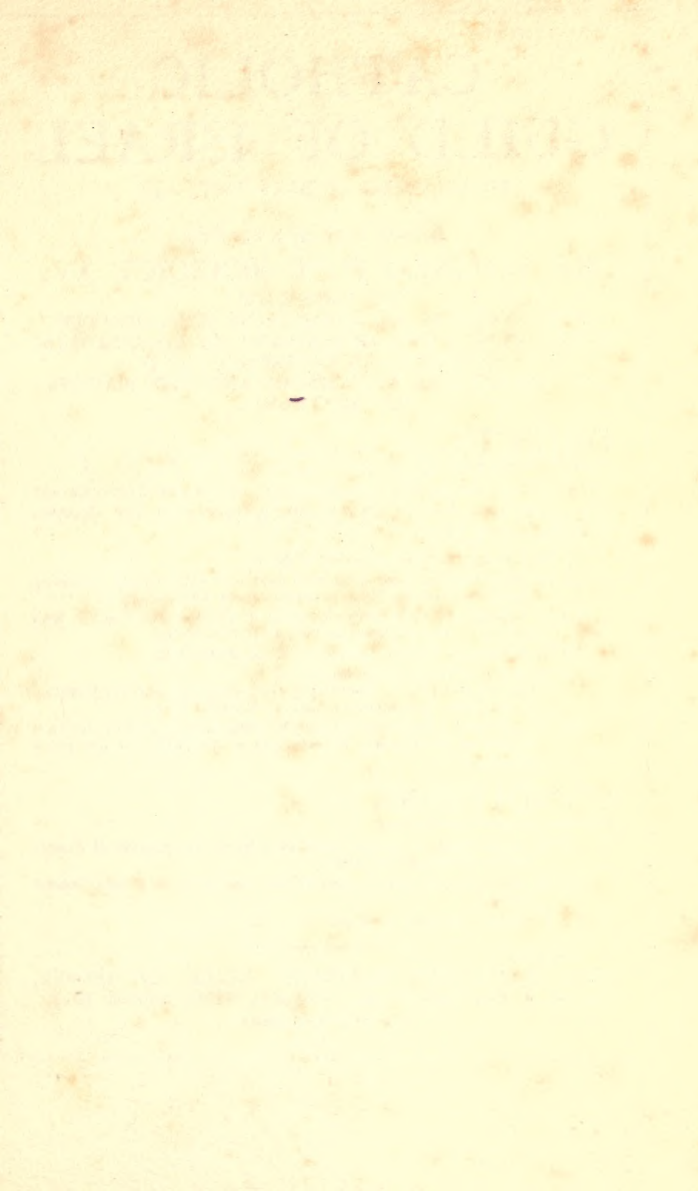


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ESTABLISHED 18 DECEMBER, 1917.

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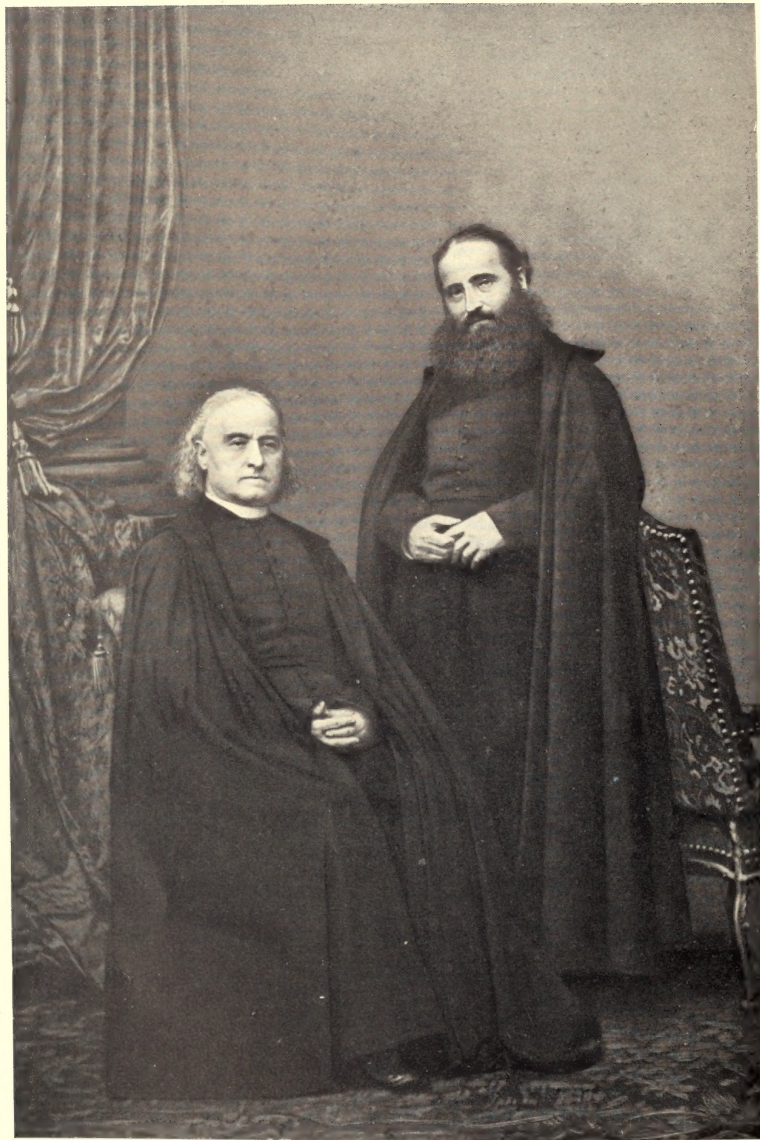
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A NINETEENTH CENTURY
MIRACLE



THE REVV. FATHERS THEODORE AND MARIE ALPHONSE RATISBONNE.

A NINETEENTH CENTURY MIRACLE

THE BROTHERS RATISBONNE AND THE
CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME DE SION
TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
L. M. LEGGATT, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE VERY REV. FATHER BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

LONDON

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Vicarius Generalis.

WESTMONASTERII

die 11 Februarii 1922

INTRODUCTION

IN recommending to the Catholic reader *A Nineteenth Century Miracle*, I can do no better than refer him to its contents. Indeed, when he has read through the story here written, he will wonder why we should have had to wait so long for a satisfactory account of this extraordinary Jewish movement towards the Faith.

The interest of the story, its spiritual enthusiasms, its vicissitudes of failure and success, its adventure and its pathos, would of themselves always have secured it a welcome. Now, however, we are grateful for its publication at last.

In its English form, it witnesses to the skill of the translator, for, while it reads easily and smoothly and not at all like a translation, yet whenever we have had occasion to compare it with the original it has not been found to fail in accuracy.

The story runs curiously parallel with the Tractarian movement, Oxford having its counterpart in Strasbourg. It throws up its leaders who, once become Catholics, do not altogether agree in their policies for the diffusion of the Faith; it is composed almost wholly of undergraduates and professors; it creates a new religious Institute (if one may be allowed this

inaccuracy when speaking of so venerable a body as the Oratory); it reacts upon the religious community from which it came out. But this group is led by Ratisbonne (1802-1884) instead of Newman (1801-1890), shepherded by Bautain instead of Wiseman, preceded by Goschler and Level instead of Ward and his friends.¹ Moreover the Strasbourg movement is earlier. Ratisbonne had been a priest already three years when Keble preached his Assize Sermon on July 14, 1833; and the Institute of Notre Dame de Sion received Episcopal sanction in Newman's critical year of 1845. But curiously, in the year 1847, the Constitutions of the Institute were approved by Mgr. Affre and Newman's Oratory began. The two men do not seem ever to have met, though Abbé Ratisbonne came to England in 1858, 1863, 1867, and had already known Manning, Faber, Gaisford, and others of the Tractarians. Finally in May, 1879, Newman was created a Cardinal by Leo XIII., and in May, 1880, the same Pontiff raised Ratisbonne to the rank of Protonotary Apostolic.

But these, perhaps forced, coincidences cannot conceal many differences in the movements inseparably

¹ Short lives of the following Jewish converts: Mgr. Jules Lewel, the Rev. Father Isidore Goschler, the Rev. Father Hermann Cohen (contemporaries of the brothers Ratisbonne), and also of Hugh Israelowicz Angress, are published by the Catholic Truth Society, and can be obtained also of the Secretary of the Guild of Israel, Convent of Our Lady of Sion, Chepstow Villas, London, W.

connected with the names of these two great men; especially in this, that there has been a gradual slackening of the Jewish movement towards the Church, while the Anglican movement has grown in force. So at least we should have said years ago. But now? To some of us it looks as though the older prophecies were coming true, more nearly to our own time than we could have dared to hope: "*He that scattered Israel shall gather him, and He shall keep him as a shepherd doth his flock*" (Jer. xxxi. 10). May this story of great faith and hope and greater charity help to lead many a "wandering Jew" to the Feet of Christ! "*There remaineth therefore a rest for the children of God.*"

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

February 15, 1922.

PREFACE

WE can never praise God too often for the wonders He works in His Saints, and it would be difficult to find any greater than those which fill the lives of the two brothers, Théodore and Alphonse Ratisbonne.

Although the story of these illustrious converts caused a great stir in days gone by far too little is known of them. "They contributed a singularly instructive and touching record to the history of the Church in the nineteenth century,"¹ which cannot be read without the profound impression we feel every time we come into direct contact with the workings of Divine Grace.

Most attractive is the description of the varied and fruitful lives of these two great servants of God; the lasting results of their wonderful apostolate of work are still the consolation of the Church and the honour of France. Born at Strasbourg, one in 1802 and the other in 1814, of a rich and philanthropic Jewish family, each brother reached Christianity by a different road.

Théodore after long, arduous study and mature

¹ Letter from Cardinal Perraud of the French Academy, October 25th, 1903.

reflection was finally guided by the venerable Made-moiselle Humann, whom God inspired with such a wholesome influence over Monsieur Bautain and his disciples, but Alphonse was brought to his knees by a lightning stroke of grace, "a great and real miracle" soon after authenticated by Rome, where every year the anniversary is celebrated with great pomp and splendour, the occurrence being even inserted into the office of "the Manifestation of the Immaculate Virgin of the Miraculous Medal."¹

"I know of nothing more likely to enlighten and move the heart of a Jew who is in good faith," writes Cardinal Perraud,² "than the conversion to Christianity of these two brothers, sincerely attached as they were to the traditions of the Synagogue and brought to the fulness of light by ways and under circumstances many of which recall the grace vouchsafed to the zealous Pharisee, the fierce persecutor of the Infant Church, the participator in St. Stephen's Martyrdom, who was suddenly transformed into the great St. Paul, untiring and intrepid Apostle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Facts so independent of all reference to texts, and so far above all possibility of doubt, constitute in themselves a most striking and incontrovertible testimony to the divinity of Christianity.

"It is to be hoped that many of Théodore and Alphonse's former co-religionists may try for them-

¹ Fifth Lesson at Matins.

² Letter from Cardinal Perraud, June 19th, 1904.

selves a method so accessible to men in good faith. I defy anyone to read this double biography of the two brothers to the end without crying out with David: '*This is the Lord's doing: and it is wonderful in our eyes*' . . ." (Ps. cxvii. 23).

The Fathers Ratisbonne both devoted themselves to the same work, to promote and hasten by prayer, abnegation, and self-sacrifice the entry of the Jewish people into the great Christian family. This apostolate by encouraging individual conversions paves the way for that general conversion which, though it may appear impossible, yet has been solemnly foretold by Saint Paul that convert from Judaism whom God especially chose to be the Apostle of the Nations.

Still it would seem that each of the brothers although working on parallel lines was to bear the distinguishing mark of his vocation.

Father Marie Alphonse was to be the man of sudden inspirations, spontaneous and ardent impulses, and his brother, the quiet, thoughtful worker, carefully and slowly preparing all his undertakings by prayer and attentive study of the Will of God.

The ardent zeal of the man converted by miracle in *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte* seems to have been the direct result of close contact with the Heart of his Heavenly Mother, whereas Father Théodore's piety was more especially characterised by prudence, and firm, patient deliberation. Father Marie Alphonse recognised no such thing as an obstacle and at every step Heaven seemed to interfere directly to help his

enterprises. What would have been audacity in any other man in him was simply a matter of going straight towards his object.

His brother keeping his soul constantly turned towards God, meditated profoundly in the serenity and peace of his interior life, carefully weighing all the possibilities of what it might be his lot to foster and direct. Despite these differences of temperament both brothers had the same unbounded trust in God, and none of the difficulties which arise when the designs of Providence have to be carried out had power to depress or discourage them.

After his conversion Father Théodore spent fifty years in the active service of God and of the Church. He was indefatigable in preaching the love of God and of souls, he was renowned as an enlightened Director, as the guiding spirit of the wide-spread "Confraternity of Christian Mothers" and as a writer of Doctrine which was solid and ascetic yet full of the unction of holiness.

Besides this he founded a work distinct from every other, and he gave the religious Congregation which grew up almost unconsciously under his direction the Biblical name of *Notre Dame de Sion* ("Our Lady of Sion"), a title which expresses its special aim: the restoration of the lost sheep of Israel to the one True Fold. And if the Founder has been rightly called "the apostle of all," so in due proportion may the Institute be considered universally apostolic, for although specially consecrated to its own work, it

takes an equal interest in all works of charity compatible with its own particular mission. Father Théodore's first helpers were a group of Alsatian ladies exceptionally fitted for their task and determined at all costs to carry out the work of self-sacrifice to which he called them. These were: the first Superior-General, Mother Sophie Stouhlen, widow of a military official of Strasbourg; Mother Louise Weywada; Mother Rose Valentin, the eldest daughter of a family well known in the capital of Alsace; Mother Emilie Lagarmitte and many others, all natives of Strasbourg. So that Father Ratisbonne could truly say to Monsignor Raess: "Sion is Alsatian." And in spite of eight-and-forty years of German oppression the Alsatian element has always been worthily represented at *Notre Dame de Sion*. Long may this tradition remain a distinctive note of the Congregation and may it increase so as to meet the needs of new and changed conditions!

It was always a great grief to Father Théodore that he could not follow his Spiritual Daughters to the vast fields of activity opening before them. While he remained in Paris, the headquarters of the Congregation, to steer the ship, Father Marie Alphonse spent his life in the Holy Land, which had become, so to speak, his special sphere of action.

He arrived at Jerusalem in 1855, and for thirty years he fought against countless obstacles; every step entailed a sacrifice. For the sake of wresting from the infidel the ruins of Pontius Pilate's Prætorium, and in

order to rescue the poor children of the Holy Land from unbelief and heresy, Father Marie Alphonse travelled over the whole of Europe many times to try and get help for his beneficent schemes.

This strenuous life wore him out, but not before he had the consolation of erecting a splendid edifice on the *Via Dolorosa* to the glory of the Divine thorn-crowned King, and had gathered together a great multitude of children who to this day are receiving in his three orphanages that enlightened Christian education which is their best safeguard against the dangers to which they are exposed.

The story of the Ratisbonne brothers is a comforting one, and which of us does not require encouragement? Their vast correspondence bears the same message to one and all, especially the letters of Father Théodore, which overflow with love and charity and are written with great distinction and charm. To those tempted to despair of the salvation of their country, his reply was: "No! France will not perish! Side by side with the harm she has done, see how much good she has accomplished, the innumerable missionaries she has sent to every country, the multitudes of women born on French soil who have served God and filled the whole world with the wonders of their self-sacrifice!"¹

"We should never despair," he writes again, "either of the heart of man or of the Heart of God. There are

¹ Collection of Homilies preached in the Chapel of Sion in 1870.

immense resources in the man of goodwill and God is infinitely merciful. I hold fast to these two immovable truths, and with Abraham I hope against hope, and with Job I shall still hope 'even though He slay me!'"¹

Pax et gaudium, "peace and joy," appears to have been the motto of this holy priest. "Keep a tranquil heart and a smiling face," he said to one of his Spiritual Daughters. "Do not let troubles make you bitter or complaining; be as a tree which can bend its branches at the right moment and drop sweet-smelling flowers or fruits on those who cast stones at it."

Only the charity of Jesus could work such marvels as filled the lives of these two apostles of Israel. Their deeds, even more than their words, were the fulfilment of Father Théodore's often expressed thought: "God has made the capacities of our hearts so large only that we may love and gain love for Him Who is Himself Infinite Love."²

¹ Letters of June, 1853, to the Abbé Achon, Vicar-General of Strasbourg.

² Letter to Mademoiselle Emilie Lagarmitte.

PARIS,
Feast of the Sacred Heart,
June 27th, 1919.

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THE FATHERS RATISBONNE AND "NOTRE DAME DE SION"

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY (1727—1825)

IN the old city of Drusus, Strasbourg, that name so dear to France, there lived at the end of the eighteenth century a rich and philanthropic Jewish family, founded by one Théodore Cerfbeer, long remembered by all classes as "Grandfather Cerfbeer." Born in Holland in 1727, he settled early in life in Alsace where his really great qualities caused him to be universally esteemed. The famine of 1770 gave him the opportunity of rendering important services to the country, and in this emergency he proved himself a man of action, prompt, energetic, persevering and absolutely incorruptible. Great dignitaries of adjoining states took him as financial adviser. Louis XVI. created him Director-General of the Army Commissariat, subsequently ennobling him and authorising him to own property in any part of the kingdom. But neither wealth nor honours could divert the mind of this good man from the unfortunate lot of his co-religionists. He had started factories on purpose to provide employment for them—a step on the way to a far more important object which was to put an end

to their agelong condition of serfdom. Thanks to Cerfbeer's untiring persistence, the King, in the year 1787, consented to appoint Malesherbes to consider the question of the emancipation of the Jews; and the decree was about to be issued when the affair passed into the hands of Mirabeau and the Jacobins, and after violent discussions the decree was finally signed on December 27th, 1791.¹ "There is no human power," says Bossuet, "which does not in spite of itself serve to procure results other than its own; God alone can reduce all things to His will." The Almighty was to work out His scheme of salvation in the very heart of secular emancipation, and in these unlikely surroundings He raised up two men who were destined to prepare the way for their brethren to enter the edifice of which Christ our Lord is the Corner-stone. Théodore Cerfbeer did not long survive the triumph of the Cause which had absorbed twenty-five years of his life. He died in 1793, leaving a name so universally respected that more than one church confided to his children the care of the sacred vessels, to preserve them from the profanation of the revolutionaries, and it was in his house that both priests and religious found a sure refuge in the days of the Terror. God was preparing a magnificent reward for this generous hospitality. In the course of the eighteenth century another Jewish family, the Ratisbonnes, became connected with the Cerfbeers by a double

¹ See "Life of V. Rev. Fr. Marie Théodore Ratisbonne," Poussieltgue, 1903, p. 2 and following.

marriage, and together they started a bank in Strasbourg which owing to the well-known ability of both partners became an unmistakably successful and prosperous undertaking. Adelaide Cerfbeer, wife of Auguste Ratisbonne, was a woman whose moral qualities equalled her personal charms. In addition to her kind heart and her exceptional gift of making others happy, she had beauty, grace, and all the proverbial delicate neatness of the Dutch. God sent her ten children, six sons and four daughters. The second son became Father Marie Théodore, and the youngest Father Marie Alphonse—children whose blessings, as those vouchsafed to Joseph the son of Jacob, were to surpass by far those of their forefathers. Théodore was born on December 28th, 1802, at the house of the Mullers, in the *Rue Ste. Elizabeth*, Strasbourg. His mother, too weak to nurse him herself, was obliged to have a foster-mother, an Alsatian peasant named Mey, a strict Protestant, who remained till her death a devoted servant of the family. Théodore was intensely dear to her and the ballad with which she used to rock him to sleep was one of the never-forgotten echoes of his childhood. He loved to dwell on the memory of this excellent woman and to recall her joy at beholding him many years later wearing the cassock. At first she was abashed by the gravity of the young seminarist, and hardly dared look him in the face, but after quietly enjoying her discomfiture for a few moments, Théodore smiled at her and opened his arms. "Mey!" he cried,

and the old Alsatian woman threw herself weeping into his embrace. Théodore always declared that he could remember his own babyhood. He would describe his first attempts to understand all that was passing around him, his feeling of love at the sight of his mother bending over his cradle, and his own puzzled bewilderment as to how or why he found himself where he was. His nature was gentle, and his disposition promised to be calm and thoughtful, quite unlike the somewhat noisy liveliness of his brothers and sisters. The merry band of children were never so happy as when they had taken possession of some empty room where they could dress up and play at theatricals. The performance always ended up with a duel, unless Mey, who thoroughly disapproved of such amusements, had suddenly appeared in the meantime, in which case there was a hurried general stampede, and those who lagged behind received the punishment intended for the whole party.

It was soon time to think of sending the elder members of the family to a very fashionable establishment where children of the wealthy classes spent some hours together every day. Each child was taken there with a basket containing the alphabet, his or her luncheon, and a piece of knitting, for the day's task was identical for boys and girls. Neither sex learned anything but reading and writing at this institution, and as soon as Théodore had mastered both these branches of knowledge he was removed. He does not seem to have been much interested or attracted by his studies dur-

ing the ensuing years. His mind was working in a direction he himself could not define. When about twelve years old he was seized with a longing for solitude most unusual at such an age, and tried to escape from the world by leaving Strasbourg, but his attempted flight did not take him far outside the city walls. He stopped close by to make a meal off the provisions he had taken with him; the light of his improvised fire betrayed him to the sentry on the ramparts and he was taken back to his parents who had been much alarmed by his absence. This is what he tells us in his "Souvenirs," when in extreme old age he reviews those early years: "I was brought up, if not religiously, at any rate in accordance with Jewish traditions and customs—the only moral principles I imbibed were from the example of a virtuous mother, and the only dogma I learned was faith in one God, who was to be the exclusive object of our adoration and fear until the coming of the expected Messiah, Who would bring back our nation in triumph to Judea. With childlike simplicity I did truly believe at first in the Messiah and long for His coming, but later, as I could neither understand why He was to come, nor why He did not appear, and was moreover quite happy in my native country, I attached no further importance to this doctrine." On leaving college in Strasbourg Théodore, then between thirteen and fourteen, was sent with one of his brothers to a school in Frankfort where the sons of the wealthiest Jews were educated. "I was miserable," he writes, "and

desperately homesick in the midst of this undisciplined crowd. We received no sort of religious instruction beyond being taught to read Hebrew and God was never mentioned. But some inward feeling seemed to urge me to meditation and I was often deeply moved to prayer."

Théodore had spent two years in Frankfort when his mother recalled him to Strasbourg and engaged masters to give him a finishing course of study. Meanwhile the passage of time had brought more and more wealth and luxury to the Ratisbonne family. They had now moved from their former home into a large handsomely furnished house, not far from the *Place d'Armes*.

The effects of this prosperity reacted on the Jewish inhabitants, and the importance and influence of the Ratisbottes were increasingly recognised by the whole Jewish community. Théodore, indifferent as he was to the artificial pleasures of wealthy and worldly society, infinitely preferred the beauties of nature—vast horizons, picturesque Swiss scenery and the ascent of rocks where only the light-footed chamois had ever climbed before him. On several occasions he went so far in his contempt of danger as to risk his life but God was preserving him for a special purpose. His Jewish convictions had grown no stronger, he had cast aside all outward practices of religion, and in addition to this was thoroughly tired of a course of study which had only served to show him effects without their causes, and events with no motive power behind them and no ostensible object to achieve. At

this stage his father decided to send him to Fould's Bank in Paris that he might learn business.

"The Foulds were old friends of my parents," he writes, "and I lived with them as one of the family." But the mere thought of working for interested motives was distasteful to Théodore. He had practically unlimited credit, "but I never abused it," he adds, "for I spent nothing in pleasure. I was perfectly free, under no sort of supervision, without any guidance, and with no religion; my only outlay was on lessons in English and music which I engaged masters to come and teach me. I was surrounded by temptations and how I was preserved from them I cannot tell. Yet I am wrong in saying I had no religion: my religion was the memory of my mother." That mother, who was to him the type and personification of moral beauty, and whose intelligence and virtues and firm but tender influence had never lost their power over her son, was about to be taken from him and he was not present at her deathbed. Madame Auguste Ratisbonne while still comparatively young, died at Strasbourg in December, 1818, after a short illness, when Théodore was sixteen years old. "At that age," he wrote long after, "a son first begins to realise all that his mother means to him; as a child he loves her by mere natural instinct, but as a boy growing to manhood he loves her with full understanding, deep respect, and boundless confidence."¹ His grief was so

¹ Father Ratisbonne, "*Rayons de Vérité : la maternité chrétienne.*"

intense that he barely survived the shock. He had lost what was dearest to him on earth, and for the first time was face to face with the problem of death and the uncertainty of a hereafter. Days and weeks passed in bitterness and desolation. "I was inconsolable," he writes, "at having no one left whom I could call mother. What would not words of religious consolation have meant to me then! But I knew of no man or book to teach me the science of divine things. I should have turned with repugnance from anyone attempting to speak to me of Christianity, which my training of course represented to my mind as idolatry. I had lost all faith in Judaism, and the synagogue seemed to me a barrier between God and my soul." Still seeking peace the idea came to him, he tells us, "of engaging a professor to teach me religion. A young 'liberal' Rabbi came three or four times a week to explain more or less clearly the significance of the Hebrew ceremonies; . . . these lessons left no impression on me beyond the fact that as a matter of conscience I read long Hebrew prayers every day for the repose of my mother's soul." Three or four years passed in this way until, at last Monsieur Fould anxious at the young man's continual depression decided it was his duty to advise the elder Ratisbonne to send for his son, and Théodore returned to Strasbourg, not much wiser in banking concerns than before he left. He had no business ambitions whatever, but as banking was the career marked out for him he had thought it right to carry on the family traditions. He

soon, however, discovered that his uncle looked upon him with disfavour, and feeling himself thwarted, he turned his mind to literature. "I read novels," he says, "I wrote verses and even began a tragedy of which I wrote as much as three acts, and as my taste for literature grew so my aversion for business increased. I do not know how nor whence came my antipathy for money but in this respect I was never a Jew. My only pleasure in economising was the idea of being able to give alms."

At last Théodore unable to bear his aimless life any longer begged his father and uncle to let him leave the bank. His idea was to go up for legal examinations and in time become a barrister. Consent was given with a pitying smile. Perpetually obsessed by the contrast between the illusions of pleasure and the reality of death, the young man had come to the conclusion that he ought to lead a strict and stoical life on the lines laid down by pagan philosophers. He left the city and went to live at a country place called *La Robertsau*, in those days a very lonely spot near Strasbourg, where one of his father's servants brought him from time to time a week's provisions. His brothers and friends every now and then banded themselves together to try and drag him out of his seclusion—sometimes by cheerful raids on his hermitage and sometimes by midnight alarms in order to scare him into returning home with them, but Théodore turned a deaf ear to it all.

In his ceaseless wonderings over the why and where-

fore of human life Théodore was beginning to feel there was some hidden mystery behind them. Having heard of Freemasonry he asked in perfect good faith to be affiliated, but no voice from the Lodges answered his perplexities. "Yet I was assiduous at the meetings," he says, "and had even the honour of becoming one of the five 'lights' of these darksome gatherings." In the end the net result of his contact with this sect, after certain ordeals which he discovered to be pure charlatanism, was a depleted purse. He next resolved to concentrate his attention on philosophy and science, which by now he had come to think the one thing necessary. He started eagerly to read up Rousseau, Locke, Voltaire, Volney, and Bolingbroke, and this course of study killed and uprooted the last traces of his traditional beliefs.

"I was sick of myself and my empty theories," he said later. "By dint of reasoning about good and evil and the riddle of the Universe, I had become, if not an absolute atheist, a sceptic of the deepest dye. . . . I had indeed fallen into an abyss! . . . Once when I was spending the night in the garden and had been gazing up at the stars for a long time, I felt surprised that I had ever imagined such splendours to be spontaneously self-produced, and as I watched the innumerable armies passing over my head, I realised that some mighty Intelligence must have presided over their creation and regulated their rhythmic march across the heavens. These thoughts went through my mind without bringing conviction and in

this moment of anguish I called upon the God of my childhood in all the bitterness of my soul. 'Oh, Thou Mysterious Being,' I cried, 'Creator, Lord, Adonai! If Thou dost exist take pity on thy creature! Show me the way which leads to Truth and I swear to follow it to my life's end!'"

And indeed God could not have been far from the heart of the just man who called upon Him with such fervour. Meanwhile, in the midst of such perplexities Théodore's studies were at a standstill. He obtained his father's consent to continue them in Paris, with some vague idea that perhaps celebrated professors might help him to find the light he was earnestly seeking.

He left Strasbourg towards the end of 1822 and took rooms in an hotel on the *Quai de Fleurs*; there, with other students, he frequented the *Théâtre Français* which had been recommended to him as a school of declamation and diction. Although becoming utterly worldly he was always a living proof that filial reverence, as long as it lasts, is the best protection that a man with no religion can have. Jewish society in Paris offered him no less brilliant attractions. . . . "But," he says, "after all the amusements which absorbed my time I fell back into a state of dreary emptiness and misery. Soon a strange feeling of anxiety began to take hold of me. An inward voice seemed urging me with great vehemence to leave Paris. I fought energetically against this strange impulse for in addition to the motives which had

caused me to leave Strasbourg, pride forbade my returning there. My friends would laugh at me for being so changeable and I should be held up to ridicule for coming back again so soon to my family after bidding them such a long farewell. Nothing indeed justified my return, but still my conscience continued to urge me imperiously. All my inward resistance was met by the implacable suggestion, 'Strasbourg.' At last the impulse became irresistible, and I started though feeling I must confess rather ashamed of myself. But the hour had come when Providence was to act directly and unmistakably on my life. Troubles and disappointments had made me more tractable and I was in the desperate condition of a man who has long struggled to refuse the hand stretched out to save him and must now grasp it and allow himself to be snatched back from death."

CHAPTER II

THE DAWN (1797—1825)

“THE origin of almost all great happenings can be traced back to the influence of a woman, and at each memorable epoch of history there has arisen one of those unique personalities who, even when living in retirement from the world, have either started, checked, or encouraged some of the greatest and most important enterprises.”¹ In the year 1766, about a century after the revelations made to St. Margaret Mary, and just when devotion to the Sacred Heart was spreading to every diocese in France, a child, who was also predestined to a great love of that Divine Heart, was born at Felsenheim in Lower Alsace on September 29th, Feast of the Archangel Michael, protector of the ancient and chosen people of God. She was christened Louise-Madeleine. Jacques Humann, her father, an exemplary Christian, held a small post in the Strasbourg Custom-House, and this daughter was the eldest of seven children amongst whom contrary to all human expectations were a future statesman and a dignitary of the Church.²

In the shelter of the patriarchal home where God had placed her Louise before long showed signs of

¹ R. P. Th. Ratisbonne: “Introduction à la Vie de St. Bernard.”

² M. Georges Humann, Minister of Finance under Louis-Philippe, and Mgr. Humann, Bishop of Mayence.

great gifts of both heart and mind. From the age of three she would remain spellbound for hours at a time over the pages of an illustrated Bible. She began her own education without the help of teachers, and later on would instruct her brothers and sisters in the knowledge she had acquired. Her touching, childlike piety obtained for her the privilege of Holy Communion while still very young. Determined to gain as much insight as possible into the science of divine things, she studied the Catechism of the Council of Trent so thoroughly that she gained the first prize at the examinations held in the Strasbourg Cathedral.

Her devotion to the Catholic Faith grew even stronger by contact with the Protestants who visited her family. She learned Latin, and her serious study of history gave her a knowledge of mankind and the motives which prompt their actions. It was said of her later¹ that, "Although gifted with a really remarkable intellect, she had all the average woman's love of domestic work, and every day would lay aside her books and her pen for the needle and the distaff. She regularly attended to her household duties after her hours of study, and was equally successful in both, showing the same zeal in all her actions—little and great. Varied and profound as was her learning it never interfered with her faith. She remained as devout and obedient as the humblest of women, and her favourite relaxation after the most abstruse and tiring studies was to say her rosary. . . ."¹

¹ Abbé Bautain : "La Chrétienne de nos Jours."

Mere passing interests could not suffice to satisfy a heart of such purity united to great mental gifts and a vigorous will. She aspired to a life wholly devoted to prayer and seclusion, and in 1788 was admitted into the Community of the Sisters of Notre Dame. But unfortunately after six months' probation her health had suffered so much as to oblige her to return home, and for the time being her life seemed utterly unsettled and aimless, when suddenly a Divine call, strongly resisted at first, brought her into contact with the guide whom God had chosen to revive her courage and dispel her perplexities. This was the Abbé Colmar a native of Strasbourg (he was born there in 1750, and was distantly related to the Humann family). Burning with zeal and full of an enlightened love of God this holy priest was a specially tactful and intelligent confessor. His wise direction attracted great crowds of the Faithful to his Confessional, and among them he soon discovered the exceptional personality whom the designs of God evidently intended to become his especial charge.

After consoling her and restoring her to full confidence and peace, the Abbé Colmar induced her to join some other ladies who were banded together to visit the poor, the sick and prisoners—a mission not without danger for the Revolution was then raging in all its horror.

Mademoiselle Humann who had quickly become the chief instrument of Abbé Colmar's charitable undertakings, shared his peril when, after refusing to take

the Constitutional Oath, the brave priest resolved to risk death in order to continue in secret his pastoral work in Strasbourg.

More than once his preservation could only be explained by supernatural intervention; he was several times on the point of being surprised by rigorous, hand-to-hand searches, yet he escaped as by miracle, only to expose himself again to capture. . . . It was during these militant years that a steady and spiritual friendship grew up between Mademoiselle Humann and Madame Thérèse Breck, an engineer officer's widow who had also placed herself under the Abbé Colmar's direction. Wishing to bring her three young children under the good influence of her devout friend, this lady asked Mademoiselle Humann to share her home and there gather together other children in a kind of study-centre. Above all they were to receive a thoroughly Christian training and education. This project was realised, and the house in the *Rue Ste. Elizabeth* became to the faithful of that day what the Catacombs were to the Early Christians. The apostolic priest hunted on all sides could take refuge there, and the Mysteries of the Church could be celebrated in secret. Many a young girl was able to make her First Communion instructed and prepared by Mademoiselle Humann, who had become the guardian of the Blessed Sacrament and had more than once saved that precious Treasure by hiding It in her bosom.

It was then that her wonderful aptitude for train-

ing and her influence over others had full play. "People have often spoken to me," she said, "of my so-called talent for educating young people and attaching them to myself. . . . What is this so-called talent? . . . It is love. I speak to them of Him who is Love Incarnate and urge them to love Him. That is the sole secret of my power, my talent and my eloquence."

Furthermore, God gave her, as well as her guide, a premonition of future graces to be bestowed, for which they were to hold themselves in readiness until the time when the tempest now raging should have been quelled. These presentiments were to a certain extent fulfilled by a memorable circumstance. "During the early days of June, 1797, it was decided that Mademoiselle Humann, Madame Breck, and the young people in their care, should go and spend a short time at Turkenstein with the Abbé Colmar who was in great need of rest. The estate of Turkenstein, purchased by Madame Breck and situated on the summit of the Donon, a mountain in the Vosges, is not far from the parish of Fromont. In the grounds was a small chapel built against the rocks at the foot of the old château. The children's time was divided between pious exercises, lessons, and long walks over the wooded mountains, while the Abbé Colmar, Mademoiselle Humann and Madame Breck discussed the best way of responding to the call which seemed to come to them so clearly from on high. The Feast of Corpus Christi fell while they were there and was cele-

brated in this secluded corner of the world with prayer and hymns of joy. The day after the Octave was the Feast of the Sacred Heart. The Abbé Colmar and his two spiritual daughters spent it in adoration in the Chapel, and towards evening signed the deed of union which, like a tiny seed hidden in the earth, has by the power of God produced a tree with fruit-bearing branches.

"*Vive Jésus!*" said the Father to his daughters. "You believe that for your own salvation and for the complete success of what you are undertaking for the glory of Our Good Master, the one thing needful is that you should be inseparably united on earth as you hope to be one day in Heaven. God has inspired your Father with the same idea. . . . This union will be not only between you, my dear children, but between your Father and yourselves, since it is through him that God has deigned to communicate His designs to you and urge you to carry them out with loving fidelity. Thus our three hearts will be one in God, and this we promise to remember in gratitude every time we kiss the Crucifix which we shall each bear on our heart, after I have blessed them. . . . At present I have no further lights on the subject beyond the fact that God wishes this union for the sake of comforting the sick, and especially for the education of young people in these days utterly neglected, and which, even when undertaken, is seldom based on religious principles. Our refuge in trouble and perplexity will be the Adorable Heart of Jesus which we seek to make

known to the whole world, and whose feast-day we shall celebrate with great solemnity in order to draw down the graces we require. . . .”

Although the precise object of their union was not yet explicitly defined it seems quite clear that God gave some intimation of it to Mademoiselle Humann, for before leaving Turkenstein she drew up a prayer containing, in substance, the whole apostolate to which her life was to be specially dedicated later on. This prayer is called the “*Litany of the Good Shepherd*,” and is composed of various texts from Holy Scripture, with invocations to Our Lord, repeated as follows :

Jesus, Good Shepherd, Prince of Shepherds ;

Jesus, Good Shepherd, raised up by God to be the One Shepherd ;

Jesus, Good Shepherd, Who wast sent to the lost sheep of Israel ;

Jesus, Good Shepherd, Who camest to seek and find the lost sheep ;

Have pity on us !

Thus, after eighteen centuries of reproach the Jewish people became once more the object of compassionate intercession, an echo of the prayer from the Cross. This isolated supplication was destined many years later to be reiterated for the salvation of Israel in all parts of the world, and in preparation for this work of intercession God was now raising up those who would give young children a Christian education.

Towards the end of 1800 persecution was dying down and the First Consul allowed churches to be

reopened, but the faithful of Strasbourg were greatly grieved by the Abbé Colmar's nomination to the Bishopric of Mayence.

His departure was a special blow to Mademoiselle Humann and Madame Breck, since to all appearance it meant relinquishing the plans based on their compact at Turkenstein. But the Divine Providence of God far from allowing events to interfere with His designs turns them to the accomplishment of His will.

Mademoiselle Humann on her return from a journey to Mayence in 1802, was told of the need of a centre of Christian education, and all obstacles being removed the two friends founded there the *Pensionnat Joséphine*, so-called from the favour shown it by the first wife of the Emperor Napoleon. Mgr. Colmar was the soul of the good work done there. With the impetus given by his wide learning and knowledge, Mademoiselle Humann's own intellect developed still further. This remarkable woman made notes on many important works, came into contact with the great thinkers of the period and even learned Hebrew. But her health was declining, and on the death of Mgr. Colmar (December 15th, 1818) she decided to put the management of the Institute, which was now too much for her, into other hands. On her return to Strasbourg in March, 1819, her great grief was to have no one with whom to share those treasures of enlightenment and learning with which prayer, experience, and study had so enriched her soul and mind. At this time she wrote in her spiritual notes: "If my life on earth is to be

prolonged, it must be for some reason either connected with myself or with others. Thou, O God, knowest that the most fervent wish of my heart is to have less knowledge and a greater love of Thee. . . . Whether I am to be used in Thy service or to be utterly useless. . . . *Fiat*, Thy Will be done! . . .”

This is the stage of detachment at which Our Lord awaits souls whom He is going to use for the furthering of His eternal designs. In the autumn of the following year Mademoiselle Humann, apparently by mere chance, was brought into contact with Monsieur Louis Bautain a former pupil of the *École Normale* who had been appointed at twenty years of age Professor of Philosophy at the Strasbourg Royal College. He taught there with great success until the hard work and fatigue of his own studies as well as his classes, forced him, young as he was, to take a rest. He came to Baden for the waters at the time Mademoiselle Humann was there. “I had heard of her piety and learning,” he said, “and I expected to see a kind of blue-stocking, a prospect which by no means attracted me. I was surprised to find her a very simple person, dignified and calm in manner and of few words. What she said was clear and to the point.”

Mademoiselle Humann at this time was fifty-five. “Her exterior was rather forbidding,” proceeds Monsieur Bautain, “and many people might have put down her dignity to pride. There could be no active sympathy between her and a young man of twenty-five. It was her philosophy that attracted me at first.

But soon I was drawn to more than this ; she had the purest and most generous nature I had ever met. In addition, her intellect was most superior and all-embracing ; her penetrating mind grasped almost any subject with ease, and her reasoning powers were clear and decided. She sought and communicated light, without ever forsaking the limits of common sense.

“Merely as a philosopher she would never have influenced me, for I should have commenced to argue with her, a process which has never yet been known to bring souls together. Besides which, my pride as a *savant* would have revolted from being worsted by a woman. But as she was before all things a real Christian her kindness won my heart, while her intellect was enlightening my mind, and affection, which breaks down all barriers, predisposed me to listen to her words. Philosophical dissertations,” he goes on to say, “brought us to the domain of religion, for her philosophy was rooted in faith and was only used, at least in its highest form, to illumine revealed truths and make them more easily apprehended by the mind, and more easy of practice to the will. Along these lines were gradually revived the beliefs of my childhood, vivid at the moment of my First Communion, and since checked, though not utterly destroyed, by philosophical prejudice. At last I reached the conviction that Christian doctrine is the crown, or at any rate the last word of all philosophy. . . .”

After about two years of careful direction Made-moiselle Humann, certain that she was moving in the

right direction because she was following step by step the guidance of grace, led her adopted son back into the bosom of the Church and had the happiness of seeing the sceptic philosopher develop into a true and solid Christian.¹

In answer to the prayers of His faithful servant, God had allowed her zeal to come in contact with and set on fire a torch which should bring light to other minds still wrapped in darkness but hungering for the Truth. Henceforth Monsieur Bautain consecrated himself to Our Lord as to the Source of all Light, and Mademoiselle Humann communicated the Divine spark of heavenly charity to each of the disciples he was destined to win for Jesus Christ. But the evolution of religious ideas in the mind of the philosopher was gradually made manifest, and the professor who had become a Christian once more was suspended by the Faculty. Although sceptics and rationalists had been allowed to teach what they would, at the reassembling of the students in 1822 the professor found himself dismissed from his post at the Royal College. Mademoiselle Humann was then living in the *Rue Toussaint* with Madame Breck and the latter's son, Jean Marie, whom both ladies had nursed through an invalid childhood. Adolph Carl, Mademoiselle Humann's nephew and pupil, joined them, and before long Monsieur Bautain took up his home there as well. He had hardly settled down before some of his former pupils asked him to give them private lessons, to

¹ "Life of Monsieur Bautain," by the Abbé de Régny.

which he consented, still continuing to teach them when two years later he resumed his public classes. These last events happened just when Théodore Ratisbonne, impelled by some irresistible force, was leaving Paris to return to Strasbourg. He had just put down his name to study law, when a young man whom he had never seen suggested his taking a course of philosophy which Monsieur Bautain had consented to give.

"Monsieur Bautain was very celebrated at the time," wrote Father Ratisbonne later on in his "Memoirs," "but I only knew him by sight and reputation. . . . As for the person who made the suggestion to me I did not know he was a Jew, and had no idea that one day he would be my most intimate friend, my brother in Jesus Christ, and a fellow-priest. . . . This was Monsieur Jules Level, then a law student and later on Protonotary-Apostolic and Superior of *St. Louis des Français* in Rome. I accepted the proposal at once, for I always looked upon philosophy as the only path to knowledge and truth. . . . At first there were but four pupils in the class—a Catholic Irishman, a schismatic Russian and two Jews. Monsieur Bautain himself had only recently returned to the practice of his religion. His teaching was quite unique; it was like a flood of light and a torrent of living water gushing out from the depths of his profound convictions. We listened with emotion and followed in admiration the developments of a doctrine which initiated us into the mysteries of

Nature and mankind. . . . Before the resistless and living force of his fervid eloquence all the mists which had gathered in our minds during former lectures melted away. His words not only shed light into my mind but brought joy and peace into my heart; the scales dropped from my eyes and I beheld the soft radiance of truth. It was Christianity in its sublime ideals without theological formulæ.

“Unwittingly I was feeding on Christian teaching and I little guessed that religion was hidden beneath the luminous mantle of philosophy on which I gazed with such delight. Although I did not realise it the dawn of that Divine radiance was surrounding and penetrating me on every side. I think I should never have had the courage to look Christianity, as such, in the face. . . .”

The course of lectures which began in 1823 attracted many more students the following year, among whom Théodore introduced one of his co-religionists, one Isidore Goschler, who soon “shared all my feelings.”

“What struck us both in the beginning of your lectures,” he said later to Monsieur Bautain, “was that you based all your teaching on books which the Jews consider holy. . . . Wonder of wonders! It was you who reconciled us with the God of Abraham and of Jacob. . . . It was you who used to say to us: ‘First become devout Jews, and truth will do the rest.’ . . .”

Truth will do the rest! These words sank into the

hearts of the fervent adept and his two friends. But they felt a premonition that their master's doctrine came very near beliefs which were purely Christian, and they dreaded to follow them to their logical conclusion.

Théodore had begun keeping the Sabbath very strictly, and in spite of his family's sarcasms, was to be seen at Synagogue. But notwithstanding all the efforts he made to return to the practices of his forefathers they caused him unconquerable distaste, and, sore at heart, he gave them up.

"Oh ! how shall I describe the hard battles I fought with prejudices inborn in me," he exclaimed long after, "with my memories and my attachment to that vague and nebulous thing I called the religion of my fathers ! . . . I was not learned enough to realise the identity of Judaism and Christianity. . . . I did not believe that the God of Abraham was the God of the Christians and I dreaded to go deeper into the question. 'I say again,' our professor would repeat, 'the Christian religion is not a new one . . . there is not, there cannot be, more than one true and Divine religion any more than there can be more than one God. Christianity is the development and the perfecting of Judaism, in the same way that an edifice is the continuation and the complement of its base.'"

Under this clear teaching the disciple was unconsciously becoming a Christian, and he could no longer understand the "lightheartedness of those who are believers, and who yet play about like children in the

public streets of this world, forgetting that life on earth is but a journey towards a sublime end."

As the unity of God, the sole dogma which had been taught him thoroughly in his childhood, seemed to him incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the professor showed him how several texts of the Old Testament hint at the threefold unity of the Divine Persons, and at last a day came when Théodore could exclaim: "From the depth of my heart, now and for evermore I say, Glory to God the Father, to God the Son, and to God the Holy Ghost! . . ."

On January 25th, 1825, Mademoiselle Humann lost her dearest friend Madame Breck. "I received an invitation to the funeral," says Théodore, "and for the first time I crossed the threshold of a church. From my place behind the coffin I had the impression that the soul of the dead woman was praying for me."

He took an excursion into Switzerland during his next vacation which was rendered memorable by an incident described as follows in his "Souvenirs":

"At the time of this journey I already had a fervent belief in Jesus Christ; yet, strange to say, I could not bring myself to invoke Him nor even to pronounce His Name, so profound is the aversion of Jews for this Holy Name. A peculiar circumstance put my faith to the test. I was so overfatigued by a dangerous climb that I fell ill in an hotel in Geneva and my imagination dwelt on sinister prognostications of death. . . . At this crucial moment I did not know what God to

call upon. My soul was a battlefield whereon the prejudices of my childhood struggled against my new faith; I dared not invoke the God of Christians for fear of offending the God of Abraham. . . .

“The storm was violent, but grace prevailed. Like a cry of distress straight from the heart, the name of Jesus came from my lips. This was in the evening and by the next morning I was so much better that I was able to leave Geneva the same day. My invocation had done me so much good that I continued to pray. The name of Jesus became easy to pronounce and I called upon Him confidently. I ventured also to invoke the Blessed Virgin. My mother’s tenderness, which was unforgettable, gave me some inkling of what the love of Mary might be. I could not separate the names of Jesus and Mary; they meant to me all that is most precious on earth and in Heaven and I loved them with a love I cannot express.”

This love was the first impulse of a fervour destined to be tried by many ordeals before the young man’s faith should become firmly rooted in his heart.

CHAPTER III

CONVERSION (1825—1828)

WHILE Théodore's religious convictions were thus being transformed a new field of action quite unexpectedly opened up before him. His father, who was President of the Consistory, was working at the time for what was known as the regeneration of the Jews.

Since the year 1791, owing to the liberty allowed to all forms of worship, this people had been admitted to mix on an equality with the rest of society and the contrast between them was now becoming deplorably apparent in the eyes of the cultivated and scholarly section of the Jews. This regeneration was purely a matter of superficial civilisation which they proposed to supply by founding schools. Monsieur Auguste Ratisbonne asked his son to undertake the supervision of those opened in Strasbourg. "It was a hard trial to my newborn faith as well as to the remains of my former intellectual pride," says Father Théodore, "to accept a mission which would bring me into contact with such a repulsive population." But Monsieur Bautain encouraged him. "What a noble career is before you," wrote the latter, "and what an immense amount of good you will be able to do to this and to succeeding generations!"

"Such possibilities," continues Théodore, "and more especially my intense longing to transmit the lights I had received, made me decide to accept the responsibility of this philanthropic undertaking and thenceforward I gave myself up entirely to the work. None of my relations or friends had any suspicion of my leanings towards Christianity; outwardly I appeared to be diligently going through my legal training, but the care of the Jewish schools was really nearest my heart. My friends helped me by every means in their power and the success obtained was greater than I had ever hoped for!"

Théodore was nearly twenty-three years of age; he was preparing his final thesis for admission to the Bar and his family began to think seriously of settling him in life. "Innumerable were the suggestions," he says, "that were made in the endeavour to retain me permanently in the world . . . in one sense the idea was always before me, for, having to draw lots for the subject of my thesis (for admission as barrister), I happened upon the two Canons of Civil Law referring to marriage. So my very occupations moved in a vicious circle." Then came a fresh proposition which bade fair to turn him back from the path along which God was so unmistakably leading him unknown to the young man himself. He was offered the chance of a very brilliant marriage with a young lady of name and fortune and possessed of every good quality. Not a day passed without his being urged to realise what was called his "chance of happiness." But he

felt as if held back by some invisible power, and utterly incapable of taking any decisive step. Monsieur Bautain, whom he consulted in great distress of mind, abstained from all advice so as to leave his friend quite free, merely quoting the counsel of St. Paul: "If you marry you will do well, if you do not marry you will do better"; and Théodore continued to feel quite as undecided as before. At last, when his perplexities were at their height, light was vouchsafed him. "One evening," he tells us, "I was longing for fresh air and I went out mechanically without caring whither I was going; I prayed inwardly as I went along and raising my eyes I noticed a very brilliant star which detached itself from the rest and moved in the direction of the road where Mademoiselle Humann was living. No doubt this was a natural phenomenon, but to me it seemed supernatural guidance and I followed my 'lucky star' at once. A sudden inspiration sent me to Mademoiselle Humann. My friends and I were in the habit of meeting Monsieur Bautain at her house for our philosophy classes, but we did not know the devout lady herself. I had only seen her two or three times but had never spoken to her, though I must say her venerable and sympathetic appearance had deeply impressed me. Despite the lateness of the hour I went straight to her. She seemed somewhat surprised at the visit of a young man in a state of great agitation, and who said quite naïvely and without further preamble: 'I have come to ask your advice; I am being pressed to embark on a mar-

riage which attracts me very much but I can neither make up my mind to go to the young lady's family nor to stay here; I seem incapable of coming to any decision.'

"'It is never wise to decide anything in moments of agitation' she answered in the kindest manner imaginable. 'Stipulate for three months' delay and when you have quieted down you will be able to think calmly what to do for the best.'

"These few simple words immediately stilled the tempest within me. My heart seemed full of a peace such as I had never known before. From that day forward a supernatural bond seemed to link my wretched self to that great soul and I began to understand the mystery of spiritual affinity . . . all thoughts of marriage melted away like clouds before the sun." And thus, at the very moment when the need of some direct intervention was making itself felt, God, who had made use of Monsieur Bautain to enlighten Théodore's mind, put Mademoiselle Humann in his way. Henceforward she was destined to watch over him as a sacred charge, training his soul to the Christian life and its virtues with all the irresistible sweetness and authority of a mother. He was called to the Bar on January 26th, 1826, and on April 4th went to be sworn in at the Royal Courts of Justice at Colmar.

But he felt it his duty not to practise as a barrister, as the legal profession had only attracted him out of ambition, and he began to study medicine with his friends on the advice of Monsieur Bautain. These

young men having come to the conclusion that there would always be plenty of barristers to defend their clients wished to devote themselves to some work of charity but none of them had yet thought of any higher vocation.

So for two years Théodore returned to the life of a student during which time the truths of Christianity penetrated more and more into his soul, while he chafed at the impossibility of openly avowing his convictions. "Oh, how I used to thrill with joy," he exclaims, "when I slipped furtively into church on some holiday! I shall never forget my feelings at my first High Mass! From the bottom of the church where I was hiding I suddenly saw the priest above the Altar elevating the Blessed Sacrament! His white hair melted into the clouds of incense, and his gold vestments blazed like fire . . . he seemed a being from another world. . . . When I came out of the church it was like coming down from Heaven to earth. . . .

"I went on," he continues, "from glory to glory, my imagination revelling in the spirit and poetry of Christianity, my mind relieved and satisfied by the writings of Bossuet and my whole heart feeding with delight on the word of the Gospel. I was all impatience to read these Divine pages, but I had resolved not to begin until I had thoroughly gone through all the books of the Old Testament. How well I remember it all! It was nine o'clock in the evening when I finished the last line of the Old Testament and at

once opened the New. I was so absorbed in what I was reading that I could not leave it even for part of the night; in one draught I emptied the cup of living water of St. Matthew's Gospel. It was the same with that of St. John, and twice I began it without being able to stop until I had read it from end to end."

Under Mademoiselle Humann's guidance the young man's faith was passing from the speculative to the practical phase. "I had found a true mother," he writes . . . "hers was that real and wonderful kindness which remains for ever engraven on the heart; in my eyes she was superior to any woman I had ever met before. The very sight of her raised my thoughts, so to speak, above the things of this world and gave me a foretaste of the perfection of the Blessed in Heaven. I loved this mother with a love which drew me from all other affections and brought me near to God. She made me understand the Blessed Virgin, and the more I grew to love her the more I loved Jesus Christ, Source of all love." In obedience to an instinct which Théodore thoroughly appreciated (the principle of "leaving all to God when it is a question of the union of souls"), Mademoiselle Humann allowed his trust and confidence in her to become firmly rooted before gradually leading him to the threshold of Christianity by the practice of the more elementary virtues, a careful rule of life and the habit of prayer.

His supervision of the Jewish schools had absorbed all his time since 1825. More than a hundred children had been gathered together, and their good conduct

and general progress testified to the efficacious training they had received. "I undertook to expound the history of their forefathers," said Théodore, "but a historical account is merely a form by which the principles of pure morality are transmitted to the pupils."

His words had a good effect on the parents themselves, and in order to bring them still more under this good influence meetings were held every Saturday in the large classroom of the school. Parents came eagerly thinking they were to hear examinations on the week's work, but they found to their surprise a course of religious and moral instruction. Soon a society for encouraging work as a necessary complement of these lessons was started and developed very rapidly. At the public meeting at the *Hôtel de Ville* in 1828, Théodore was asked to give an address, and he rose to the occasion by a splendid speech in which the Christian spirit was unmistakably apparent even through the veils which still concealed it.

"We should never despair of any nation," concluded the orator. "The Jews, led and preserved throughout the ages as an ever-living miracle of Divine goodness and justice, are not being saved only that they may perish in misery and neglect towards the end of the world. With the most profound of philosophers we say : *For if the first-fruits be holy, so is the root also; and if the root be holy, so are the branches* (Rom. xi. 16). . . ."

The editor of a religious paper reporting this meeting, adds: "One thing strikes us as curious, and that was the quotation Monsieur Ratisbonne gave from 'the most profound of all philosophers.' Now, this 'profound philosopher' is St. Paul. . . . It is perhaps the first time that St. Paul has ever been quoted with respect in a Jewish assemblage, and this wise tolerance shows the young barrister to be a man of good feeling."

When Théodore thus addressed the élite of his co-religionists he was already pledged to the truths of Christianity, and not merely in sympathy with its theories and sentiments. During the preceding summer Mgr. Le Pape de Trévern then recently promoted to the See of Strasbourg had become friendly with Mademoiselle Humann's family, and the Bishop was very favourably disposed towards Monsieur Bautain and his group of students. He realised Théodore's exceptional position and all his difficulties, and that was probably the reason why the conditions of the latter's Baptism were facilitated.¹

"I know not what precautions nor what steps were taken," we read in the "Souvenirs," "but one day I received a letter from my mother² telling me that my Baptism would take place in the April of that year (1827), on Holy Saturday. I remember that as I left

¹ We have explained that Mgr. de Trévern gave this unusual dispensation owing to the exceptional circumstances of the case.

² This refers to Mademoiselle Humann, whom Théodore looked upon as his spiritual mother.

our house to which I should return a Christian I met my eldest brother who shook hands and asked me where I was going. 'Close by,' I answered. And, indeed, I had but one step to take to pass from Judaism to Christianity, from the Synagogue to the Church, from Moses to Christ, from death to life.

"My mother, dressed in white, was awaiting me in her own room; she herself poured the waters of regeneration over my head and brought forth her son to new and Christian life. It was a simple private Baptism without witnesses or ceremonies. No one, not even Monsieur Bautain or my other friends, knew what had passed under the eye of God alone—I was a Christian, and that was enough for me."

Just as the purifying water fell upon Théodore's bowed head, the church bells broke into a joyful peal heralding in the great Easter Festival. Mademoiselle Humann could not keep back her tears; the wonderful ways of Providence had made her a true mother in Israel, and it seemed ordained that this first-born of a countless spiritual generation to come was to open the eyes of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the light of Jesus Christ, and lead them after him from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land.

But the newly-made Christian shall describe his happiness in his own words. "I realised to the full the real effect of my Baptism," he says; "it was ineffable; I was like a man born blind who sees the light for the first time. . . . New life was running in my veins. . . . I felt an indescribable sense of joy,

freedom, dignity, gratitude; all Nature seemed to smile on me and a new light illumined the whole world. I saw everything from a fresh standpoint, and my delight at becoming one of the great Christian family was so intense that I could hardly keep from stopping the passers-by to tell them of my happiness."

Then came longings for Holy Communion, but it seemed prudent to keep him waiting for a time.

Monsieur Bautain had received a visit the year before from a man who left a great impression on his young followers as they had never yet spoken to a priest. This was Father Martin de Noirliieu a former chaplain to the Polytechnic School and one of the tutors of the Duc de Bordeaux. During the holidays of 1827 he came to Strasbourg and it was decided to take advantage of his presence to bring about what had not been possible hitherto. Théodore tells us that this good priest was very pious and learned, and that in his great kindness of heart he himself offered to take the neophyte to Mayence to make his first Holy Communion there in private.

"I received this great privilege," he says, "in the Chapel of the Bishop's Palace, which was full of memories of Mgr. Colmar. . . . The diocese was then under the charge of the Abbé Humann, brother to my spiritual mother and afterwards Bishop of Mayence. . . ."

The Abbé de Noirliieu, before admitting the young neophyte to the Holy Table, completed the baptismal ceremonies, Monsieur Bautain being godfather and

Mademoiselle Humann godmother. This took place on September 12th, 1827, Feast of the Holy Name of Mary.

Isidore Goschler, who had been baptised a few weeks after Théodore, was also privileged to receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord, and later on both were confirmed. On receiving this latter Sacrament, Théodore added the name of the Prince of the Apostles to his own Jewish name of Simon. In after-days he was fond of saying: "I am called Simon-Peter Louis-Joseph Marie-Théodore." Next to the names of his holy patrons received in Baptism, the Blessed Virgin and the Apostle of the Jews, he held in the greatest veneration the memory of Mgr. Louis Joseph Colmar, who no doubt had blessed these first-fruits of the compact of Turkenstein.

"When the travellers returned from Mayence," writes the Abbé de Régny, "there was great rejoicing in the little household of the *Rue de la Toussaint*. But it soon became evident that there were serious complications coming, and that God would ask great things of those who had received such signal graces." "These graces," Théodore tells us, "first awakened in my mind the idea of a vocation to the priesthood. I could think of no greater honour than becoming a Catholic priest. In all my prayers I implored this grace . . . my ambition was to become one day a country parish priest, and I believed my medical studies would be most useful in such circumstances."

With this idea in view he continued to walk the hos-

pitals, but when he found himself by the bedside of his patients he felt more inclined to offer them spiritual consolations than to diagnose their complaints and prescribe remedies, for he admits that he had no taste whatever for medicine as a career. On the other hand, Mademoiselle Humann thought his work in the schools a good preparation for a mission to which he felt so strongly drawn, and she encouraged him in the face of the opposition which the Jews were beginning to show. His family also were getting anxious about what they called his original way of living and suspected him of a leaning towards Christianity. Their suspicions were justified by imprudence in his devotions. He never missed going to church early in the morning, wrapped in a big cloak which everybody knew well by sight.

One day his youngest brother, Alphonse, who was going with him to see Monsieur Bautain, saw Théodore make the sign of the Cross on his breast and rushed home, almost beside himself, to tell the family what he had seen.

"My father," says Théodore, "had always been devoted to me, he had given me great powers of authority over the schools, but he now began to feel uncertain whether my influence was good or harmful. . . . The whole Jewish community was getting agitated about me, and my father was appealed to on all sides to explain my secret views. . . . Owing to family reasons my colleague Isidore Goschler had to resign his post, and he took this opportunity of realis-



ing his heart's desire. Free from all ties and untrammelled by any temporal considerations, he entered the Seminary to study for the priesthood.

"The amazement and indignation of the Jews may be imagined. . . . I was known to share my friend's views to a great extent. The children were no longer to be entrusted to me, and I was called upon on all sides to resign. The President was the only person who had the right to demand my resignation, and he was my father. He knew that my leaving would mean entering the Seminary and this he dreaded beyond all things. . . . I can hardly bear to think of the pain I caused him! I had also to face the reproaches of my brothers and sisters, and it was then I began to realise the meaning of Our Lord's words: "I came not to bring peace, but a sword. . . ."

By dint of patience and courage the neophyte succeeded in lulling suspicion, but if the Synagogue felt reassured Monsieur Auguste Ratisbonne did not. At last he summoned Théodore to a confidential interview. "I went," says the latter, "with the respect and deference of a son but also with the courage of a Christian. My father reminded me in a penetrating voice of all the marks of confidence he had given me and then asked in plain words if I were a Christian. 'Yes,' I answered, 'I am, and it is my faith in Christianity which has made me give up all the luxuries of life in order to devote myself to the regeneration of my fellow-men.' My father remained speechless with consternation. 'I am a Christian,' I pursued, 'but I

worship the same God as my forefathers, the Thrice-Holy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel.'

"My father was past all words : he wept bitterly ; I had never seen him shed tears and burning drops filled my own eyes at the sight. I felt my heart was breaking and my limbs refused to support me. He looked at me as if to ask if I were really his own son . . . and then he said that of all the misfortunes he had ever known this was the greatest and the most irreparable ; he invoked the memory of my mother and rejoiced that she was not here to see the day of such affliction. . . . At last in his indignation and despair he was about to curse me . . . but I forestalled him and rushed away to seek strength and counsel in meditation and prayer. I had not forgotten that he who prefers father or mother or aught else on earth to Jesus Christ is not worthy of Him.

"I wrote at once to my father saying everything affectionate and consoling that I could think of, but telling him that, although willing to go on with the work of the schools and avoid any public scandal, I would rather die than abjure my faith. . . . We became reconciled completely and I had a few weeks of peace, though feeling very sad."

The scandal which the relations of this brave soldier of Christ had so much dreaded was brought about entirely by the Jews themselves : they attacked Auguste Ratisbonne again demanding the resignation

of his son and insulting the latter in the street and even in his father's house. The situation was unbearable and had to be faced and settled.

Théodore, who had decided to avow his beliefs openly, called a special meeting of the members of the Consistory, the Council and the Elders. "My father," he says, "presided over the assembly although he guessed my intention. After giving a short summary of the work to which I had devoted myself, I tried to make these poor Jews understand that their regeneration and progress was a question of something deeper than mere superficial culture and knowledge. I concluded by asking the President to decide once for all whether I was to continue my functions. He put it to the meeting, and one kind old man expressed a wish to keep me if I would remain a Jew.

"My father spared me the answer and accepted my resignation. When once the solemn conference was over the Jewish community triumphed and my family was plunged in gloom. That same night I left my home and went to live with my hospitable Christian friends in the house of Mademoiselle Humann."

A group of students of religion and philosophy had assembled round Monsieur Bautain, all had the same ideas and views and all lived a kind of family or community life sharing their resources. It was there that Théodore under the protection of his spiritual mother fought his last and hardest battles with himself and against his relations. Every day different tempting offers of all kinds were made to him; he was tortured

by every kind of appeal, even to the tears of his sisters. In after-days, in all the plenitude of experience gained at the cost of countless sacrifices, he could well say : "To leave the world is nothing, to leave relations and friends is something, but to cast off the old self is much—indeed, it is all."

These events happened during the early months of 1828, and at this time the Society of Science, Agriculture and Art of the Lower Rhine Provinces started a competition for the best answer to the following question : *What is moral training, and how may it best be applied to men of different rank in the social scale?*

Théodore competed and won, his essay was "crowned," and deservedly so, for it showed great maturity of judgment, to which, no doubt, his recent work in the Jewish schools had contributed.

The young author dedicated his pamphlet to his father. "My dear father," he wrote, "I was longing to express my gratitude for the noble and truly paternal way in which you treated me under painful circumstances, and fortunately the success I have just obtained gives me the opportunity. May this proof of my affection and filial respect be some compensation for trials which, in the end, will, I am sure, turn to your advantage. . . ."

This was, so to speak, the line of demarcation between the past from which the neophyte had torn himself away at the cost of so much pain, and a future in which the paths of father and son were never to cross again.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY DAYS OF THE MINISTRY (1828—1840)

ALL the efforts of Théodore's relations to keep him from becoming a priest failed before the new convert's firm resolve to follow the Divine call. "Oh, holy Church of God," he exclaims, "what could be more profound and immovable than my desire to serve thee? I know not when nor how this longing grew up in me, but now I seem as if I had felt it all my life. I remember one day my old uncle saying in a moment of despair that he would rather see me torn in a thousand pieces than wearing a cassock. 'You would gain nothing by that,' I answered quietly, 'for if I were torn to pieces each separate part of my body would become a priest, and instead of one cassock you would have a thousand.'"

All Monsieur Bautain's pupils in turn, as well as he himself, realised that their vocation was to the priesthood. Mgr. Le Pape de Trévern did all in his power to facilitate matters for these very exceptional aspirants, and with this end in view he hurried on the opening of a Seminary for Higher Studies in his own country house at Molsheim. In the course of three years they were all admitted to Holy Orders. Théodore received minor orders on October 28th, 1828, Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, and was made Sub-Deacon on the 20th of the following December.

His joy and gratitude knew no bounds at finding himself thus irrevocably consecrated to the service of God.

The Seminary for Higher Studies, as conceived originally by Mgr. de Trévern, contained twelve students. Doubtless it was a great advantage to belong to this select group which had the additional privilege of the Bishop's special and frequent attention. Furthermore, the small number of students made it possible to organise the work on broader lines than is usual under the somewhat rigid discipline of an ordinary Seminary. But Théodore himself sincerely regretted that the training was not more ascetic, and would have preferred living in a larger community where he could have become acquainted with his fellow-priests.

"Mgr. de Trévern," he tells us, "was extraordinarily kind to me. The gentle old man, a relic of the *ancien régime*, in addition to his natural distinction had the charming manners and great dignity of the clergy of the Court of Louis XIV. Banished from France by the Revolution he had spent many years in England and was sixty years of age when nominated to the See of Strasbourg. He had brought a distinctly Gallican atmosphere into this very Roman diocese." The books in his Molsheim library were in accordance with this tendency. But Théodore had learned from Mademoiselle Humann to attach himself above all things to the immovable Rock upon which Christianity is built.

"By the grace of God," he wrote later, "from the time

I was ordained, and at every epoch in my life since, I have never for one moment ceased to be an obedient child of the Father of the Faithful. I believed in his infallibility long before this truth was defined as a dogma."

But cares of a very different kind troubled the neophyte. He was one of the first to pass the barriers which had hitherto separated the children of Israel from the Christian priesthood. "Many of my co-disciples," he says, "could not find it in their hearts to overlook my origin and the faith of my forefathers, even though the Apostles and all the members of the Early Church had been of my former religion." And not the least of his troubles was being separated from his spiritual mother whose supernatural tenderness had comforted him when his heart was nearly broken by the severing of near and very dear family ties.

From time to time he was given leave to spend a few days with her, and twice a week she wrote him long and eagerly anticipated letters to make up for their former conversations.

Hardly anything remains of this precious correspondence, most of which was destroyed in 1849. "I thought I was dying of cholera at that time," writes her spiritual son, "and I burned more than two hundred letters from our revered mother. I do not regret the sacrifice; there are things that have nothing to do with this world, and only relate to Heaven. . . ."

"After emerging safely from exterior conflicts," he goes on to say, "I had to set myself to conquer my own

rebellious nature which had never known the yoke of discipline, and also to bend my indomitable will and my habit of dictating to others. In a word I had the stiff-necked and hard-headed characteristics of the children of the Old Law and I realised that before trying to improve others I must reform myself."

The life of St. Teresa and the writings of Bossuet, especially the "*Discours sur l'Histoire universelle*," were of great value to him both spiritually and intellectually, but the books which interested him above all others were those treating of the conversion of the Jews. "All the Fathers of the Church from St. Paul downwards have foretold this wonderful event," he writes, "and I felt myself called to co-operate in it. From my heart I longed to pour out over the children of Israel the superabundance of peace, light, and joy which I myself had found in the Christian revelation."

Zeal for souls was just as active in the home of Mademoiselle Humann. Her house became a centre of preparatory instruction in the Faith. All these newly baptised Christians, in the true spirit of the Church helped and sustained each other against the persecution which assailed them on all sides, and the young Seminarist was well qualified to strengthen the others in their family difficulties by the experience of what he had gone through himself.

Théodore was ordained Deacon in Ember week of December, 1829. He at once took advantage of the powers conferred on him and began to preach.

His first sermon was most promising. "I went to

Molsheim to hear Théodore," says Monsieur Nestor Level, one of his colleagues, "and was much pleased. I think he has the makings of a great preacher. He is animated and profoundly touching."

Meanwhile the Jews irritated at his perseverance tried to counteract it by spreading calumnious reports about his faith. "The deserter from the Christian camp," said they, "would like to return to the faith of his forefathers." Théodore answered these lying rumours victoriously, but the revengeful passions of his enemies were not long inactive. "My father was ill and dying," he tells us, "he wished to see me, for my reception into the Church had not weakened either his affection or his trust in me. More than once I had been able to speak to him of my convictions before death parted us. But I was forcibly taken away from him before the blow fell, and this was one of the most agonising ordeals of my life. One night I had been called to his bedside and found him speechless and dying. I was standing at the head of his bed calling down the Divine assistance with my whole heart, when several Jews, whom I had not until then perceived in the dim light, threw themselves upon me. It was an awful moment! I fell on my knees beside the bed and defended myself, crying out with my whole strength, 'Jesus, save me!' And this cry, bursting from my breaking heart, gave the last shock to my father on his death-bed. May that Name, the last word he heard on leaving this world, have been his first on entering Eternity!"

This happened on October 31st, 1830. Théodore was on the point of becoming a fully ordained priest; the last of his earthly ties was severed, and on December 18th he received the holy Chrism. But it was not until January 6th, Feast of the Epiphany, in the Church of St. John, Strasbourg, that he said his first Mass. Mademoiselle Humann was present. She had embroidered with her own hands the Altar frontal and the alb worn by her spiritual Son. Monsieur Bautain served the Mass of the Son of Abraham now become "a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech." His brothers in Jesus Christ who had preceded him in the priesthood were with him, surrounded by a sympathetic congregation of the Faithful. Among the devout, kneeling crowd was a soul specially marked out by God to become later on one of his devoted helpers.¹

Monsieur Bautain and his first followers, Adolphe Carl, Jules Level, Ratisbonne and Goschler, soon to be known as the priests of St. Louis, were now ready equipped for service in the cause of the Truth they professed. Their great wish was to work together if possible, and it seemed the will of God that they should do so, as the Bishop offered them the direction of the *Petit Séminaire Diocésain*.

This institution was then anything but prosperous, but material considerations did not weigh with either Monsieur Bautain or his colleagues. They accepted the work on condition that no remuneration was

¹ Mademoiselle Louise Catherine Weywada.

attached to it. Soon other helpers, men of intellect and energy, began to rally round them, beginning with Alphonse Gratry, then a brilliant pupil of the École Polytechnique, who was introduced by the Abbé Martin de Noirlieu.

"The group was most exceptional," Théodore wrote later. "All these young men had sacrificed a great future and many were born to wealth, which, as I have since noticed, is nearly always the great obstacle to a life of self-sacrifice. But they had escaped even the snares of riches. All were intelligent and well educated, and I have never met elsewhere with so much zeal and whole-hearted generosity. They had pledged themselves unreservedly for life and death to the cause of God's Truth. . . . I cannot describe all the love, hope and energy which animated this little band of men. . . . The mission seemed a Heaven on earth."

Nestor Level, while still a Jew, had gone to Syria as army surgeon to the French troops, and on his return he, too, was unable to resist Divine grace, and followed the example of his brother who was already in priest's orders.

"Doubtless you have learnt we have another recruit," writes Monsieur Ratisbonne a few months later, "in the person of Monsieur de Bonnechose, formerly Attorney-General at the Law Courts in Besançon, a very distinguished and clever young man as well as fervent. . . . At the close of a nine days' Retreat . . . he gave up his post, and is now a student in the Seminary."

The year 1831 brought two more members to the group—Jacques Mertian and Eugène de Régny. The family of the latter was originally from Lyons but had long settled in Italy. After studying law at the University of Pisa, de Régny became a financier in Paris. The Revolution of July had happily broken down all the obstacles between him and his aspirations to a higher vocation, and Martin de Noirlieu brought him within the holy influence of Mademoiselle Humann's home.

Jacques Mertian came of an old and very devout Christian family of Strasbourg, and had already gone through his Divinity course in the Jesuit houses of Strasbourg and St. Acheul, so that he entered the Seminary with knowledge and experience.

It fell to Monsieur Bautain to give suitable work to each of these men of talent and good-will, and this task entailed upon them no small amount of self-sacrifice, for the dictatorial manner and inflexible will of the Superior were not calculated to smooth down the susceptibilities of those under his rule. He was a man of more intellect than heart. Long afterwards the Abbé Ratisbonne recalling the days of this severe noviciate with the Abbé Mertian, says: "We did not lead a life of ease; ours was a school of renunciation and self-sacrifice. Our occupations were numerous as there were numbers of students and a dearth of masters. We had to hold classes, supervise the work and the recreation of the boys, arrange walking parties, take our turn at patrolling the dormitories during the night,

preach and hear confessions; and all this in addition to pursuing our own studies."

Father Ratisbonne seems to have felt the pressure of this life even more than the others, as his personal inclinations were not at all in accordance with Monsieur Bautain's theories; and the young priest felt much more drawn to even the humblest functions of the priesthood than to the work of teaching. This divergence of views accounts for Monsieur Bautain always assigning inferior and uninteresting work to the Abbé Ratisbonne. He put him in charge of one of the Lower Forms, and gave him but few classes in more advanced divisions. "I felt this deeply," said Ratisbonne later. "It seemed so hard also to restrain my zeal for the conversion of souls, to interest myself in the dreary study of stones and of their classification."

The young professor thought that if so many failed to take an interest in their studies it was because they had been taught in a dull and uninteresting way and he resolved to remedy this. "I amused myself by giving the boys impromptu dictation," he tells us, "in allegorical and entertaining form, so that instead of dreading this particular branch they were delighted when the time came for the lesson to begin." These papers were bound together later on in a volume entitled "*Allégories à l'usage des petits et des grands enfants*" ("Allegories for Children and Grown-ups"). They are written in a vein of good-natured sarcasm, with keen insight into human weaknesses which are

described in a way true to nature, but without a trace of bitterness. These short sketches form a condensed course of moral teaching, full of uplifting thoughts and striking home-truths, easy to understand and to put in practice.

The professor's gentle but firm direction gained him so much influence over his pupils that they became perfectly amenable to discipline, and so submissive that they did not even attempt to excuse themselves when reprimanded.

Meanwhile his longing for work as a parish priest had in no way abated in spite of Monsieur Bautain's opposition. The arch-priest of the cathedral, Abbé Vion, being aware of this, begged Mgr. de Trévern to let him have Father Ratisbonne as an extra curate while still continuing to work at the *Petit Séminaire*, and on Trinity Sunday of the year 1831 the newly made priest entered on his new functions. Later on he will feel more and more drawn to the direction of souls trying to lead holy lives, and to follow Our Lord's example as closely as possible, but at that time he was rather called upon to help the average Christian in his battle with the trials and temptations of daily life, and God gave him a special gift to soften men's hearts and bring them light and hope. One day he was called to the bedside of a young girl who had been struck down by mortal illness in the midst of some festivity. He found her writhing on a bed of pain and in a despairing and hopeless frame of mind. Still in her ball-dress she was fighting hard

against having to exchange it for her winding-sheet, and death was drawing very near. Yet at the sight of God's messenger and the sound of his gentle, tender words, she ceased to struggle and submitted calmly to the Will of God. Father Ratisbonne, when thoroughly satisfied that his penitent was in the right dispositions, left her, feeling that she was now supernaturally strengthened and dying in peace.

Next day, as he was saying the midday *Angelus* at the *Petit Séminaire*, he suddenly saw the figure of this girl whose death he was still unaware of, in the open window above him. He caught a sudden half-breathed murmur of thanks and she disappeared, leaving him bewildered, but feeling sure that all was well with this grateful and redeemed soul.

Convinced that piety should be based upon solid religious instruction, Father Théodore conceived the idea of starting a series of conferences for the young girls of Strasbourg, suggested by the Catechism of Perseverance given at St. Sulpice. The arch-priest approved of the idea and the conferences produced better results, by the blessing of God, than even the fervent Father Théodore had expected.

Meanwhile, during the four years of the Abbé Bautain's supervision, education at the *Petit Séminaire* had wonderfully developed and children from the best families were now crowding into the school. The priests of St. Louis in fulfilment of a vow had opened a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and by a touching coincidence, as the Abbé de Régny tells us,

"that portion of the Seminary which was converted into a chapel happened to be the first Jewish house in Strasbourg, that of the Cerfbeer family." "I was just looking forward to celebrating the Sacrifice of the New Covenant," says Father Ratisbonne, "in the birth-place of my family now transformed into an altar to the living God when a sudden and unexpected order came to put the direction of the *Petit Séminaire* into other hands."

The reason of this may thus be explained: Monsieur Bautain had enemies as well as admirers, and from the beginning they had kept a sharp eye on his teaching of philosophy in order to detect errors in doctrine. The professor, who in former days had been misled into rationalism was now, by excess of reaction, too much of a traditionalist, and this was the cause of the misunderstanding which had gradually grown up between the Bishop of Strasbourg and Monsieur Bautain.

The latter with his sad experience of the rebellions, the errors and the ruinous results of leaving reason to be guided only by pride of intellect, had come to the conclusion that without faith the human mind cannot rightly apprehend metaphysics.

Mgr. de Trévern decided to settle the question by a ruthless mandate, and dismissed both master and subordinates from their posts in the *Petit Séminaire*, depriving them at one blow of all their spiritual powers except the faculty of saying Mass. Those who had not taught philosophy, among whom was Father

Ratisbonne, could have stood aside, as individuals, from Monsieur Bautain's disgrace, but they preferred to withdraw in silence rather than make separate cause against their brother-priests.

None of them at the time could foresee the duration of their ordeal which lasted from October, 1834, till September 8th, 1840.

We need not follow out all the separate phases of the affair, but the conclusion of it was that Monsieur Bautain went to Rome with the Abbé Beauchesne and himself submitted his work, "*La Philosophie du Christianisme*," to the judgment of the Holy See, and Pope Gregory XVI. signalised whatever errors it contained by the gracious epigram *Peccasti tantum excessu fidei* ("You have sinned only by excess of faith").

As time went on Monsieur Bautain with that true greatness which men admire but seldom imitate, himself took every opportunity of pointing out and retracting the errors contained in both his writings and his lectures.

As late as 1855, in a Panegyric on St. Paul, he exclaimed: "So as to give a wider field to the word of God I tried to belittle human reason. . . . I nearly destroyed it, as an imprudent doctor risks the life of his patient by applying too violent a remedy. But the Church, always unerring, because assisted by the Holy Ghost, will not tolerate excess in anything, even when it might seem to uphold Her own claims . . . and with a gentleness for which I cannot be too grate-

ful, She checked a wrong tendency before it deepened into error.”¹

The priests of St. Louis, on leaving the *Petit Séminaire*, had intended living together and devoting themselves to prayer and study. But Monsieur Bautain's fame and the high reputation of his colleagues had been a great attraction to the influential families in Strasbourg, and they felt by no means disposed to deprive their children of all the advantages they had been receiving. Pressure was brought to bear on Monsieur Bautain, and he, wishing to keep his group together, decided to open a private Secondary School for boys in the *Rue Toussaint*, and at the same time to take a few others too young for the college in a house in the *Rue des Juifs*. By the second year there were one hundred and thirty in the preparatory school, with the Abbé de Régny as headmaster and Fathers Ratisbonne, Mertian, and de Reinach under him.

Soon a girls' school was started on similar lines in the *Rue des Juifs* by Mademoiselle Humann. At the head of this establishment she placed Mademoiselle Aubertin daughter of an officer of Napoleon and formerly a pupil of the *Légion d'honneur*. The preparatory school was under the charge of Madame Stouhlen, a widow of large means, who was advised by Father Ratisbonne to devote herself to this most excellent work.

The union of heart and will which reigned among

¹ “Life of Monsieur Bautain,” by the Abbé de Régny.

the Workers was the best guarantee of their own satisfaction and of the success of their undertakings.

It was Mademoiselle Humann's wish that this union should be cemented by a formal "act" which she herself drew up with her usual foresight and prudence. There was no suggestion of forming a Community, strictly so-called, but a kind of spiritual family living together under no formal rule but as friends united of their own free-will.

In this act, or *Pacte de famille*, as it was called, the names of Monsieur Bautain, of the Abbé Carl, grand-nephew of Monsignor Colmar, and of the Abbé Ratisbonne, come first, but it was signed by all the Priests of St. Louis on March 16th, 1832.

The Society thus constituted began its career with that firm resolve to work in unity which is such a great factor of success.

But, as we have seen, the life of a schoolmaster was not at all calculated to satisfy Father Ratisbonne's apostolic longings. The unexpected turn of events which had cut short his priestly functions had grieved him profoundly. "I had grasped the theory of renunciation and self-sacrifice, but theory is not the same thing as practice! No doubt I had been too happy in a merely human way in my ministry and it was needful for me to go farther along the path of abnegation. I did not know then that God was training me to become the father of a large spiritual family, but I see clearly now that He intended to root out

of my soul everything likely to hinder me in my new life. And it was necessary for me to pass through this phase of desolation. . . . I could not take any comfort in the companionship of Monsieur Bautain; he was cold while I was enthusiastic, perhaps to excess. I also had to fight against temptations to discouragement which would have overcome me had not God in His mercy given me a mother who had taught me to crucify my nature."

But the hour was at hand when he was to drink yet deeper of his Divine Master's chalice of suffering and follow him into the desolation of Gethsemane.

Mademoiselle Humann was now nearing her seventieth year and a painful malady had undermined her constitution since the age of fifteen. In the spring of 1836 she made her will and in July asked to receive Extreme Unction. But nothing in the house was allowed to be changed, and she herself inspired such calm in everyone about her that it was difficult to believe the end was near.

"Our revered Mother's last day on earth was September 19th, 1836," writes Father Théodore, "and at seven in the morning she gave up her pure and holy soul to God . . . at the time I was saying Mass for her at the Cathedral. . . . I will not speak of the sword which pierced my heart when I came back to the house, and found only the lifeless remains of my dearly beloved Mother! There are sorrows of which one cannot speak."

Monsieur Bautain was the only one of the brethren

with her at the last supreme moment. Shortly before the end she had said the Our Father, raising her hand as if to point him to Heaven.

"Thus died, unknown to all," he writes, "a woman who from the depths of her quiet, secluded home had more influence on the world of her time than will ever be known, for she was the source of all that was accomplished during her life and after her death by her spiritual sons, who ever since have laboured in the Church for the glory of God and the salvation of men."

The loss of Mademoiselle Humann brought important changes into the home-life of the little community. Monsieur Bautain continued, as before, to work for intellectual progress and all the priests of St. Louis acknowledged him as their head. But his disciples, according to the Abbé Gratry, had been more attracted by the holiness of the Mother than by the intellect of the Master. She had known this to be the case and had warned Monsieur Bautain in plain words that one day the majority of his brother-priests, much as they respected him, would refuse to work with him any longer.

The *Pacte de famille* might have prevented them from dispersing, but a few days after Mademoiselle Humann's death Monsieur Bautain changed the established order of things by giving the Abbé de Bonnechose the place hitherto occupied in the Society by Father Théodore. "This proceeding was quite justifiable from the point of view of his greater usefulness," says the latter, "and I quite understood that the

Society would gain by the change, but I could not help regretting anything which undermined our pledge of unity, the one rule in our Constitutions linking us together in the order God had intended."

This change did not in the least affect the warm friendship which had grown up between Father Théodore and the future Cardinal Archbishop of Rouen, and for fifty years after this mutual trust and affection continued to exist. Neither did it tend to weaken the bond of obedience which linked Father Théodore to Monsieur Bautain. The Abbé Ratisbonne resumed his ordinary occupations, dividing his time between prayer, work, teaching and the direction of a few exceptional penitents whom he advised by letter or in personal interviews.

The influence of the priests of St. Louis was still a reality. Many lapsed Catholics whom they sent to the different parish priests of the town to receive the Sacraments owed their return to the Church to the little Society and several Jews followed in their footsteps and entered the one true Fold. "I had the consolation of frequently instructing Jews who wished to be received into the Church," writes Father Ratisbonne. "It was my favourite work for I believed myself specially called to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ among the children of Israel."

Meanwhile a new project was growing in the minds of Monsieur Bautain and his followers. Their best friends were urging them to leave Alsace and transplant themselves to Juilly to continue their earlier work.

"Moving to new surroundings does away with many preconceived ideas," wrote Father Lacordaire to Monsieur Bautain. "I quite see all that is making you hesitate . . . but I believe that God, by removing a person so dear to you, has broken the principal tie which kept you back. I too have had to overcome many difficulties and I know what can be done by making sacrifices."

No one hesitates to make a sacrifice which may lead to a greater good, and by the time the reconciliation with Mgr. de Trévern to the joy of all concerned was an accomplished fact, the priests of St. Louis had definitely decided to leave Strasbourg.

CHAPTER V

THE MIRACLE (JANUARY 20TH, 1842)

THE year of Mademoiselle Humann's death, 1836, saw the rise of the Arch-Confraternity of Notre Dame des Victoires, of which, on May 20th, 1839, Father Ratisbonne became an Associate, for his grief at losing his beloved mother and friend made him cling closer than ever to the protection of his Heavenly Mother. Then during a short holiday in Paris he put himself at the disposal of Monsieur Dufriche-Desgenettes, and giving up all visits and social intercourse, set himself to answer the voluminous correspondence of the Director.

"The good priest was delighted to accept my services," joyfully writes the improvised Secretary, . . . "a privilege I owe to Mary; I feel such consolation when celebrating at this Altar!"

He was able to give only one week to the congenial task. "I should have liked to stay with my dear curé," he writes, "but I did not dare aspire to such an honour. Little did I think Providence would one day grant me what I wished."

But the day came. While negotiations were going on between Monsieur de Salinis and the priests of St. Louis relative to the latter taking over the College of

Juilly, Monsieur Desgenettes, by dint of urgent entreaties, had prevailed upon Monsieur Bautain to allow him to make the Abbé Ratisbonne his Assistant in the Confraternity.

On September 26th, 1840, the latter arrived in Paris having finally severed his family ties which a recent painful occurrence had very much strained. Auguste, one of Théodore's young nephews and son of his eldest brother, had fallen dangerously ill. Knowing the child could not recover the Abbé Ratisbonne wished to baptise him and make sure at least of his ultimate salvation. He would probably have induced the father to consent, but his brother Alphonse furious at the idea interfered and drove the priest away from the dying child in a paroxysm of rage. Théodore withdrew, prepared to endure even greater things for the Holy Name of Jesus and the salvation of those he loved.

He was always proud, in the right sense of the word, of the post God had assigned to him at Notre Dame des Victoires. When he had not long been in Paris someone asked him what his functions were. "I am the Queen's Chaplain," he replied, with a smile. And as the inquirer seemed to think it the correct thing to ask if he were the principal or the Assistant Chaplain he went on to say: "I am the Assistant Chaplain, but the Queen is the Queen of Heaven."

The duties of Sub-Director carried no emolument, the only salary taking the form of a share in the curé's frugal meals. Furthermore the Act of Union of the

Priests of St. Louis, to which Father Théodore still belonged, obliged them to place all common funds in the hands of their Superior, and the Abbé Ratisbonne would have scrupled to keep anything of his salary as a priest for himself. "I can truly say," he admitted later on, "that I experienced every kind of privation." But the hard and depressing conditions of my material existence only seemed to deepen the joy and peace with which my soul was filled."

And, indeed, God blessed Father Ratisbonne's ministry visibly and often made him the instrument of marvels worked in the souls of sinners.

One evening, to quote an instance out of many, a comparatively young-looking man came up to the Sub-Director and asked him naïvely: "Is this the Church where sinners are converted?"

The answer being in the affirmative the questioner proceeded: "What must one do?"

"It is quite simple," returned Father Ratisbonne, pointing to the Confessional. "Go in there," he added, "and I will come to you."

The penitent who was a University professor subsequently made a retreat with some Jesuit Fathers, was received into the Seminary and became later a most holy priest. Still more remarkable was the conversion of a Parisian journalist who, in order to cast ridicule on the Rector of Notre Dame des Victoires, announced in his free-thinking newspaper that on the following Sunday evening, at seven o'clock precisely, Monsieur Desgenettes would work a miracle. Many

people, attracted by this notice, came to the church out of idle curiosity, among them the journalist himself who was anxious to see the effect of his announcement. But like Balaam he had been a true prophet, for when the choir came to the invocation in the Litany, *Refugium Peccatorum, ora pro nobis*, the poor sinner fell on his knees and beating his breast begged to be allowed to confess his sins without further delay.

Such occurrences greatly encouraged Father Ratisbonne and helped to give him boundless confidence, while at the same time the sphere of his activities was always extending. "I have not been able to go to Juilly for the last ten days," he writes. "Monsieur Desgenettes cannot spare me; he is overwhelmed with letters from Catholics in all parts of the world. The Sacristy of Notre Dame des Victoires is Rome in miniature, a centre of life and grace."

In December he was told to undertake a complete course of religious instruction, given in the pulpit through the Sunday sermons. "This is very important work," he goes on to say, "and dismays me terribly. I earnestly ask you to pray and offer your Holy Communions for the success of these Conferences."¹

The Apostle of Mary never thought of sparing himself any fatigue, but being very modest and diffident, he sometimes found himself wondering whether his labours were bearing good fruit. And then the

¹ Letter of November 25th, 1840, to Madame Stouhlen.

Blessed Virgin would give him some tangible sign of encouragement.

"I felt very sad yesterday, as I came down from the pulpit," he says, "my words would not flow easily, and I was never so unconvincing. But the Heart of Mary sent me a consolation, I found there was a fish in my net. I had to hear his confession though it was nearly ten o'clock at night, but God knows how thankful I felt! I did not go to bed till half-past three in the morning. . . . It was the proof-sheets of 'St. Bernard' that kept me up so late, for the edition is now going through the Press and I do not want it to be delayed through any fault of mine."

The Life of the illustrious Abbot of Clairvaux, written by Father Ratisbonne at Strasbourg between 1838 and 1840, appeared at the end of December of the latter year. This important work, which received the honour of a Brief of Approbation from Gregory XVI. as well as the approval of many competent judges, opened the eyes of a great many readers and set them on the right path again. The glory of God and the salvation of souls were the Abbé Ratisbonne's chief aims.

Meanwhile the College of Juilly, since it had passed into the hands of the priests of St. Louis, grew more and more prosperous. The preaching of Monsieur Bautain and his colleagues was becoming such an attraction to the intelligent public of Paris that he and Monsieur de Bonnechose found it necessary to take rooms there for their fre-

quent visits to the capital. Monsieur Bautain took the first floor of a house in the *Rue Vaneau* which was occupied by Monsieur Dumassais, the Rector of the Foreign Missions and his curates and arranged that the Abbé Ratisbonne should live with them. It was during this stay of three years at the Mission-House that the latter made the acquaintance of two young men who later became famous in very different ways: one was Mgr. Gay, the illustrious coadjutor of Cardinal Pie, and the other the celebrated musician, Charles Gounod.

"Their companionship was most congenial to me," Father Théodore tells us, "but it did not make up to me for being so far from Notre Dame des Victoires."

It is true that the new home offered him the very great advantage of living in community once more, but the long journeys he had to make backwards and forwards several times a day between the *Rue Vaneau* and Notre Dame des Victoires were a great additional fatigue. Yet he did not shrink from taking on extra work. In the *Rue Plumet* (now *Rue Oudinot*) there was in those days an orphanage founded in 1820 by Monsieur Desgenettes, then Rector of Foreign Missions. This establishment supported by donations from Charles X. and the Duchesse d'Angoulême, and known as *La Providence*, was in charge of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, and in 1841 sheltered nearly two hundred and fifty orphan girls. But the Revolution had banished the generous benefactors into exile, the establishment was poor and there existed no pro-

vision for a Chaplain's salary. Monsieur Desgenettes suggested this post to the Abbé Ratisbonne, and the latter soon after wrote to Madame Stouhlen as follows: "God has put into my hands a house where a large number of orphan girls of all ages are being educated. A great many are my penitents; I preach to them from time to time; I visit the children when they are ill, and, as *La Providence* is close to my new lodging, I say the five o'clock Mass there every morning, excepting on Sundays when I celebrate at Notre Dame des Victoires. I cannot tell you how consoling it is to work in this good atmosphere. . . ."

"From the time I began to devote myself to the Orphanage," he says in his "Souvenirs," "my interior joys far outweighed my troubles. I attached myself to this sheepfold, the inmates were my family and I looked after them with the solicitude of a father as well as a shepherd. *La Providence* was a place of training for me where I could gain all the experience I still lacked. And I loved the blessed humility of a position which no one envied, and where, thanks to Our Blessed Lady, my ministry grew more and more fruitful."

The Abbé Ratisbonne was now nearing his fortieth year, and, humanly speaking, saw no chance of helping in any direct way towards the salvation of the Jews which he so yearned to do. The Abbé Goschler consumed with the same longing, said one day to Father Théodore: "I have been praying to the Blessed Virgin for so many years for my family with-

out obtaining anything that now I give it up in despair."

"I have been praying for twenty years," answered Father Ratisbonne, "and have received no answer, and that is why I still hope."

This act of faith was destined soon to be rewarded by the miraculous conversion of one of his brothers.

Alphonse, the youngest of Monsieur Auguste Ratisbonne's sons, was born at Strasbourg on May 1st, 1814. As he was deprived of his mother at the age of four, his brothers and sisters did their best to try and make up for the loss.

At the further end of the *Place d'Armes*, near which the Ratisbonne family lived, there was in those days a toyshop kept by an old Alsatian woman. Alphonse was tremendously attracted by the old lady and still more by her wares. He was for ever in the shop. But all the toys delighted him so much that he hardly knew which to choose. No one could get him to decide what to buy; he was torn between spending his pennies on wooden horses or ninepins. Long after, he loved to imitate dialogues between himself and the old lady carried on in a wonderful Strasbourg accent and reproducing to the life all the respectful speeches she made to the baby-boy whose ideas were on such a very large scale.

He received practically no religious training; all he was taught was Hebrew which he read without understanding it. He was educated first at the Royal College of Strasbourg and afterwards in a Protestant

school where the sons of prominent Alsatian families used to be sent, more in order to be fitted for worldly society and pleasures than to study.

At sixteen Alphonse lost his father, but his uncle who had no children was the family patriarch and concentrated all his affections on his nephews. Alphonse, after studying law in Paris and being called to the Bar, was sent for to Strasbourg by this second father who loaded him with presents, gave him unlimited credit on the bank and did all in his power to retain him permanently in the town.

The only reproach the uncle made the nephew was that he went too often to Paris. "You are too fond of the Champs Elysées," he would say affectionately.

Alphonse believed that we are put in this world solely to enjoy ourselves; business was a nuisance to him, but a contemporary of his assures us "that his heart had remained pure, therefore he was bound to find his way to God sooner or later."

He preferred reading history to novels. Possessed of a sarcastic and mordant sense of humour, in character he was somewhat cold and downright. He busied himself with bettering the conditions of his co-religionists and became one of the most zealous members of the Jewish *Société d'Encouragement au travail*, being as yet quite unconscious that anything beyond money and charity lotteries was necessary for the regeneration of a people. He prided himself on having no religion whatever.

"I was a Jew in name only," he says, "for I did not even believe in God. I never opened a book of devotion, and no attempt to keep up any Jewish precept was made, either in my uncle's home or in that of my brothers and sisters."¹

He was just upon twenty-seven when he became engaged to one of his nieces.² There was a great mutual attraction between the young pair, and the engagement was looked upon favourably by the family.

"My happiness seemed complete for all time," he continues. "My family were perfectly delighted, and I must say that few relations are as fond of each other as we were . . . only one of them was really hateful to me, and that was Théodore. . . . His religious habit repelled me, his ideas offended me, and his grave, quiet way of speaking exasperated me."

The young girl being only sixteen it was thought advisable to postpone the marriage for a while, and in the meantime Alphonse was to take a pleasure trip.

On November 17th, 1841, he left Strasbourg, intending to visit Naples, spend the winter in Malta and come home by the East.

"I had no wish whatever to go to Rome," he tells us. Yet he did go and remained there in spite of himself, as if the invisible force that had brought him there was now detaining him. The same incomprehensible in-

¹ Letter of April 1st, 1842, to Monsieur Dufriche-Desgenettes.

² Flore Ratisbonne, daughter of his eldest brother Adolphe, and who became later on Madame Singer.

fluence brought him into contact with his brother's friend, Baron Théodore de Bussierre, a Protestant who had been received into the Catholic Church, and who, for this reason, inspired Alphonse Ratisbonne with the most profound antipathy.

When Alphonse was about to leave Rome on January 15th he was obliged, much against his inclination, to call on de Bussierre and say good-bye. After being bombarded for an hour with sarcastic remarks on Catholicism, the Baron says: "The most extraordinary idea came into my head; it must have come from Heaven for the wise of this world would have called it madness. . . . 'As you are so strong-minded and so sure of yourself,' I said to him, 'will you promise to wear what I am going to give you?'"

"'What is it?' 'Only this medal.' And I showed him the Miraculous Medal. He started back, half-surprised, half-angry. 'But according to your ideas,' I continued coldly, 'you can have no feeling on the subject one way or another, whereas you would be giving me the very greatest pleasure.'

"'Oh, if you put it like that,' he said, laughing, 'I can at least prove to you that Jews are unjustly accused of being obstinate and incurably opinionated. Besides which, this will be a charming incident in my travelling diary.' . . . And he went on joking in a way that cut me to the heart. Nevertheless, I put a ribbon round his neck, to which my little girls had fastened the Medal.

"But something still more difficult remained to be

done; I wanted him to recite the pious invocation of St. Bernard, known as the 'Memorare,' but that was too much."

"The name of St. Bernard," says Alphonse in his account, "reminded me that my brother had written a Life of this Saint, a book I had always refused to read, and this reminder aroused my anger again."

"But an inward power still urged me on," proceeds de Bussierre, who had taken the greatest interest in the young Jew ever since their first meeting. "I fought against his objections with a kind of desperation. I held out the prayer begging him to take it away and be good enough to write it out as I had no other copy myself.

"'Very well,' he said at last, with a gesture of angry scorn, 'you shall have my copy, and I will keep yours,' and he took his leave, saying under his breath: 'Eccentric, tactless fellow! I wonder what he would say if I pestered him like that to repeat one of my Jewish prayers. . . .' 'But,' he admitted later, 'I had no Jewish prayers, and knew none.'"

Meanwhile Monsieur de Bussierre asked all his friends to pray for this conversion he so much desired. "Have confidence," the Comte de la Ferronnays answered, "if he says the 'Memorare,' you will get him and many others with him."

During the evening of January 17th this great Christian died suddenly, after saying to his wife: "I must have said the 'Memorare' more than a hundred times to-day."

And Alphonse was repeating it too. After copying out the prayer he had read it over and over again, trying to discover what made it so precious. This of course fixed it firmly in his memory; he got to know it by heart, and the invocation recurred to him every moment of the day, like an air which we find ourselves unconsciously and impatiently humming against our will. On Thursday, January 20th, Alphonse went, as he tells us in his own words, "to a café in the *Piazza di Spagna* to look at the papers,¹ and I had hardly entered when Monsieur Edmond Humann, son of the Minister of Finance, came and sat down beside me. We chatted gaily about Paris, art and politics. Soon another friend joined me, Monsieur Alfred de Lotsbeck, a Protestant, with whom I had a still more frivolous conversation. If a third person had come up to me at that moment and had said: 'Alphonse, within a quarter of an hour you will be worshipping your God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and you will renounce the world with all its pomps and pleasures, your own fortune, your hopes and your future, and even, if necessary, your betrothed and your family' . . . I repeat, if any prophet had predicted such things as these, I should have thought only one man on earth could be more insane than the soothsayer, and that man myself, for believing in the possibility of such folly!"

¹ All these quotations are taken from a letter written by Father Ratisbonne to Father Desgenettes, Rector of "Notre Dame des Victoires."

On leaving the café the young Jew met Monsieur de Bussierre in his carriage and accepted the latter's invitation to get in and drive with him. Presently they came to the Church of *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte*, where the Comte de la Ferronnays' funeral was to take place, Monsieur de Bussierre having been asked to bespeak seats for the family of the deceased at the Requiem Mass. "I shall not be two minutes," he said to Alphonse, who was walking round the church in the meantime. "The church is poor and deserted," continues the latter, "and I think it was practically empty just then. . . . There were no artistic treasures to attract my attention. . . . Suddenly I could see nothing, or rather I could see but one thing! . . . Oh, how is it possible to put into words what I beheld! . . . Human words should not be used to express the unspeakable; any description, however sublime, would but profane the ineffable reality! . . ."

"When I went back into the church," says de Bussierre in his Deposition, "I could not at first see Ratisbonne where I had left him. But I soon discovered him kneeling, deeply absorbed in prayer, before the Chapel of the Archangels SS. Michael and Raphael. At the sight I felt a premonition that a miracle had happened and a thrill of religious awe passed through me. I went up to him and shook him by the shoulder several times before he seemed to realise my presence. At last he lifted his face which was streaming with tears. 'Oh, how he must have prayed for me!' he exclaimed clasping his hands, and

I understood at once that he meant the Comte de La Ferronnays. I half-led, half-carried him to the carriage, and helped him in. 'Where would you like to go?' I asked him. 'Take me where you will,' he answered; 'after what I have seen, I will obey.'

"He then went on to say that he could not tell me more without permission from a priest. 'What I saw,' he concluded, 'I can only speak of on my knees.'

"I took him to Father de Villefort at the Church of the *Gesù*, and there Ratisbonne drew out his Medal and kissed it.

"'I have seen Her, I have seen Her!' he exclaimed, holding it out. . . . 'I had only been in the church a few moments when I began to feel agitated. I looked up and the whole interior seemed veiled in shadow, one chapel only had, so to speak, concentrated all the light, and in the midst of this radiance I saw standing on the Altar, lofty, clothed with splendour, full of majesty and sweetness, the Virgin Mary, just as She is represented on my Medal. An irresistible force drew me towards Her. She made a sign with Her hand for me to kneel down; She spoke not a word, but I understood all.'"

By the light which streamed from Mary's hands Alphonse had indeed understood all, and now longed for Baptism, "and truth had revealed itself to him so fully," says Father Roothan, "that he quickly grasped and completely absorbed all that was taught him. In a very short time he was considered sufficiently instructed, and," adds Father de Villefort, "in this

matter he had the special assistance of God and of the Blessed Virgin."

"What?" he exclaimed, when it was suggested he should wait a while for his Baptism; "the Jews were baptised as soon as they had heard the Apostles, and you want to keep me waiting when I have heard the Queen of the Apostles?"

When asked to whom he believed he owed his conversion, he answered: "To the Blessed Virgin, who obtained it from God, and to the prayers of my brother, who is one of the Directors of the Arch-Confraternity of Notre Dame des Victoires."

On January 31st the Baptism took place in the Church of the *Gesù*, the ceremony being performed by Cardinal Patrizi, Vicar of His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI. The large space reserved round the Altar where the sacred rite was to be accomplished was filled with the élite of Roman and foreign society, accompanied by a large congregation. Cardinal Mezzofante, Master of Catechumens, with fatherly kindness had himself explained to Ratisbonne all the details of the ceremonial.

Alphonse, accompanied by Father de Villefort and Baron de Bussierre, was conducted to the principal entrance to the church, wearing a long robe of white damask. He held a Rosary tightly clasped in his hands, his eyes frequently bent on the Medal attached to it.¹ First came the Exorcisms, and never had this

¹ For the information of non-Catholic readers, it may be explained that on the Medal rays of light stream from Our Lady's hands.

mysterious Liturgy seemed more truly Divine than in this scene of imposing solemnity.

"What do you ask of the Church of God?"

"Faith!"

"And indeed he had this faith, says an eye-witness — "the man whom the Morning Star (*Stella Matutina*) had illumined with Her beams!"

There was no hesitation when he professed his detestation and horror of the "perfidy" of the Jews, nor when he prostrated himself to kiss the ground, the final outward act of submission which closes the Exorcisms.

From henceforward there was to be no looking back. The Church had wiped out all his past blasphemies, and henceforward he is only to be remembered as the privileged child of Mary. Led by the prelate who places the end of his stole in the neophyte's hand, he advances towards the altar followed by the blessings of the immense crowd, which divides to make way for him. He is asked his name. "Marie," he answers, in an eager burst of gratitude and love.

"What do you ask?" the priest repeats again.

"Baptism!"

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

"I do believe!"

"Do you wish to be baptised?"

"I do!"

A sigh of unspeakable bliss, a smile of heavenly joy, and Marie Alphonse Ratisbonne raised his head still wet with the waters of Baptism. He had crossed the abyss, he was a Christian!

The Sacrament of Confirmation immediately followed to set the seal on this outpouring of graces. Then the Abbé Dupanloup proceeded to congratulate the newly made Christian in the name of the great Catholic family which welcomed him into her bosom. This was a difficult matter; he had to speak without saying a word for the present about the miracle which had not yet been pronounced authentic by competent authority.

"I bless Thee, Lord, and adore Thee," cried the great preacher, "when from the depths of Thy Eternity Thou dost look with love and compassion on the humblest of the children of Thy power, and when, in the words of the Prophet, Thou dost move Heaven and earth and multiply wonders to save those who are dear to Thee, to vanquish one single soul !

"You on whom all eyes are fixed in unspeakable emotion and the tenderest love, for it is God and His mercy that we love in you, will you not tell us your thoughts and the mysterious ways by which the mercy of God has followed you ? . . . For, after all, who are you ? . . . Tell us, for we have a right to know, why you come to share our possessions as if they were your inheritance ? Who brought you hither ? I can speak freely now, for I know the joy I am giving you by describing your misery and the Divine compassion. . . . You did not love the Truth, but He who is the Truth loved you ! . . . O God, how good, how infinitely good Thou art ! When Thou dost not come Thyself, Thou dost send Thy angels ! . . . Angels do I call

them? But which was the Angel who really came? . . . I dare not speak, yet I cannot keep silent. . . . Hail Mary! It is beyond my poor powers to describe thy greatness and thy beneficence; I can only rejoice that thy glory is past telling. . . . At thy name, O Mary, Heaven itself rejoices, the earth thrills with rapture and Hell shudders in impotent rage! None can truly invoke thine aid and perish. O Mary! we feel the need of repeating once again the prayer to which perhaps we owe the consolations of this most blessed day: *Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who asked thy help or implored thy intercession was left unaided. Fortified by this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of Virgins, my Mother, unto thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petition, but in thy mercy hear and grant it! . . .* ('Memorare').

"I do not say remember this young man, for he is thy child and a glorious trophy of thy love, but I beg of thee to remember those dear to him, for whom his Catholic heart is praying to-day. Reunite them in this world and in Eternity! . . ."

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass then began.

Marie Alphonse followed the service deeply absorbed in prayer. When the solemn moment was reached and the Cardinal, his hand trembling with emotion, laid the Sacred Host on the tongue of the neophyte, Ratisbonne, hitherto so calm and self-controlled in all his fervour, burst into sobs. . . . At last

the *Te Deum* rang out in a torrent of sound from the hearts of all present; it was no mere solemn rhythmic chant, but the loud acclamation of a multitude swept by the enthusiasm of their faith.

The Abbé Ratisbonne had been aware of his brother's projected trip to the East, but, not being in correspondence with Alphonse, had heard nothing of the sudden journey to Rome. Nevertheless he continued to pray and get prayers for the soul who was so dear to him, with the true Christian instinct of doing good to those who have given us pain.

"On the evening of February 1st, 1842, I was kept very late in the Confessional, as it was the Eve of the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple," he tells us in his "Souvenirs," "and I was having my supper alone in the presbytery of the Foreign Missions, when I noticed several letters addressed to me lying on the table. I hurriedly put on one side an envelope written in a hand I knew. It was from Monsieur de Bussierre, who had asked me to look over some proofs of a book of his then in the Press, and I only opened his letter after I had read all the others."

"Perhaps you may have been surprised," writes de Bussierre, "that my last letter was so short, but you will soon understand why. I have a most wonderful story to tell you." And after relating the principal circumstances of the event of January 20th, the writer ends by saying: "The whole of Rome is calling it a miracle; a great many people have been very much

disturbed in mind and all seems to portend that this marvellous conversion will be followed by others. . . . Marie (for your brother is no longer called Alphonse) is in a state of happiness which is a foretaste of Heaven, and he speaks of you with the greatest affection."

This letter, full of enthusiasm, ends by a few lines from the happy convert himself. In them he reveals the new and spiritualised affection he bears his brother; the wish to forestall erroneous judgments concerning the grace vouchsafed to him; and an ardent desire to make others believe in the powerful and compassionate intervention which has vanquished his own stubborn heart.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"God has permitted my whole life to be a series of anti-Christian acts, up to the very hour of my conversion. He has also permitted the conditions and circumstances of my life to be such, that my sudden conversion can only be explained by a miracle of Divine goodness."

Father Théodore's feelings as he read those letters cannot be described.

"Next day," he says, "I went as usual to *La Providence* to say Mass. I was due to preach, as it was the Feast of the Purification, but in spite of all my efforts to keep calm I broke down completely and my tears flowed upon the Altar. . . . I realised that the congregation was disturbed and to reassure them I ex-

plained the reason of my emotion, and told them, as simply as possible, the story of the miraculous conversion. The account seemed to rouse their sympathies, but when the name I was trying not to reveal came from my heart in spite of myself, a mighty thrill passed over the whole assembly and with one voice all the orphan girls began to chant the *Magnificat*.

"I nearly fainted several times before I could finish my Mass, but I hope God forgave my weakness."

The news could not be concealed for long and the newspapers were already publishing notices. On the following Sunday, at Notre Dame des Victoires, Father Desgenettes insisted on his assistant telling the story to the Arch-Confraternity, for the glory of God and the honour of the Blessed Virgin.

That evening the church was crowded to the doors.

"When," says the Abbé Desgenettes, "Father Ratisbonne, after describing the circumstances of this astounding conversion, said '*This convert is my brother*,' those present could not contain their joy and surprise, and a loud exclamation came from the huge congregation, as if an electric shock had passed through them all. Many tears of joy were shed. For a year past they had all been praying fervently for the Ratisbonne family, and Father Théodore had more than once asked the Arch-Confraternity for prayers for his brother Alphonse. It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm of the multitude as they sang the *Magnificat*, and it soon spread to all the other Catholics in the town."

"What touched me most," says the Abbé Théodore, "was the light that now seemed vouchsafed with regard to the great question of the return of the Jews. The Blessed Virgin's visible intervention in the late occurrence in Rome seemed to predict the fulfilment of the promises made to this nation. This idea, which has so possessed me ever since I first realised my vocation, also took deep root in my brother's mind from the moment of the miracle."

Marie Alphonse arrived in Paris early in March and the Abbé Ratisbonne's feelings as brother and priest can well be imagined. The brothers had hardly met since their painful parting, and Alphonse was now restored to Théodore as a Christian, transfigured from within by the light of Heaven.

"I refrained from questioning him on the miracle of his conversion," says the Abbé; "I knew that it is best to keep silence concerning the mysteries of grace."

Once only did the neophyte attempt to satisfy his brother's unspoken wish by describing the ineffable vision of *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte*, but the recollection was too vivid, the words died on his lips, and the two brothers embraced with tears and thanksgivings to God, and the subject was never again mentioned between them.

Before long the convert was overwhelmed with visitors whom he could hardly avoid; he was offered every kind of honour, but he made it understood that he preferred remaining at the poor *Mission of La*

Providence, where the very sight of him was an exhortation to orphans and nuns alike. His family had renounced all claim on him, and he wished to use his liberty by consecrating his life to God and his fellow-men, under the protection of Mary.

Henceforward, as the Abbé Ratisbonne tells us, his conduct was almost more of a miracle than his conversion, for he led the life of a born Christian versed in all the ways of the cloister.

"As far as I can see," he says, "he seems likely to enter a Jesuit Novitiate."

At one time the two brothers thought of going together to Jerusalem, to make their thanksgiving at the Sepulchre of Our Saviour. But the Divine call which had come to Alphonse brooked no delay, and Théodore's work could not be interrupted for so long a time as it would take to visit the Holy Places. It was therefore decided, with Monsieur Bautain's consent, that Théodore should accompany Father Desgenettes, who had arranged to start for Rome on June 16th, and about the same time Marie Alphonse would go to Toulouse, where his term of probation would be spent. By taking up his abode in the Society of Jesus, as in a cenacle, he would prepare himself for the mission to which he was called, the regeneration of his nation.

It was the most favourable time possible for the Abbé Ratisbonne to be in Rome; the Decree authenticating the miracle had just been promulgated, and it was in the very presence of the Sovereign Pontiff

Gregory XVI., that he learned this fact. After describing the splendours of a *Triduum* of Thanksgiving at *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte*, he adds: "I cannot express what I felt while offering the Holy Sacrifice, surrounded by the de Bussierre family and many other devout souls who had wished to receive Holy Communion with us! What a welcome I have received on all sides! I feel quite abashed at so much honour which I am so little accustomed to receive!"

One thought occupied his mind while in Rome to the exclusion of all else, and this was that the conversion of January 20th was a marvel worked by God, not for the salvation of one, but of many. The object which the elder brother had had so long in view was no longer the aspiration of one lonely priest; it was a call from the Sacred Heart, revealed by the Mother of God, which Marie Alphonse had to transmit, and Marie Théodore to carry out. *Ite potius ad oves quæ perierunt domus Israel.*¹

This message Théodore received from the mouth of Christ's Vicar himself at his first private audience in the Vatican. He was about to stoop and kiss the foot of St. Peter's successor, according to custom, when the Pope held out his arms and clasped him in a warm, fatherly embrace. Greatly encouraged by such a welcome, the Abbé Théodore opened his whole heart to the Holy Father and asked him to give him a definite mission to work for the conversion of the Jews.

¹ "Go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Gregory XVI. solemnly rose to his feet, and placing both hands on the head of the descendant of the tribe of Levi, now ordained priest of the New Law for the salvation of his brethren, blessed him long and fervently, as if to invest him with all the graces corresponding to his new apostolate. Théodore's dearest wishes were now granted and he rose from his knees fully strengthened to meet whatever obstacles might lie in his path.

The plans of the two brothers had now been sanctioned in Rome with an efficacious blessing given to their work, and Marie Alphonse was anxious to begin as soon as possible. The miracle had inspired him with a special longing to give a Christian education to any Jewish children who should be presented by their parents. The Abbé Ratisbonne who had returned to Paris prayed long and often on the subject, having recourse to Our Lady's intercession.

"One day," he writes, "I turned with some diffidence to the Blessed Virgin, and said to Her: 'If it is thou, O Mary, who hast inspired my brother with this idea, make known to me the Will of God by some sign which I cannot mistake. Before putting my hand to the plough I ask that one single Jewish child may be brought to me, and that its parents may consent to my baptising it.'

"I had asked this in prayer in the morning," he proceeds to say, "and before the end of the day I received the sign I had asked for. A letter was brought to me from Monsieur Aladel, legal adviser to the Lazarists,

to the following effect : 'A good Sister of Charity (who was none other than the celebrated Sister Rosalie) has found two young girls whose mother is dying, and whose father takes no interest whatever in them. Both the daughters and parents are Jews; the Sister has given them the Miraculous Medal and they know a few prayers; the parents would be quite willing to give up any claim on them if they could hope to get them educated. The Sister has had what she calls an inspiration to send them to the Ratisbonne brothers. She feels so hopeful that you may admit these children to *La Providence* and that this good work will be followed by their conversion, that in the meantime she has placed them with a devout Catholic lady. The elder girl is fourteen, the younger eleven.'

There was no doubt as to the Abbé Ratisbonne's consent, "for," as he says, "as I read the letter I felt that the Blessed Virgin Herself was answering my prayer. I thanked Her fervently and went next day with Monsieur Aladel to see Madame Würmser, the mother of the girls."

Not long afterwards the poor sick woman was touched by Divine grace and asked to be baptised, which was done on the 7th of the following November. The convert's godmother was Mademoiselle Clementine Desjardins, a very fervent parishioner of Notre Dame des Victoires, where she was a willing helper in all the good works of the Sub-Director. Madame Würmser's First Communion was fixed for the day after the Baptism.

"I shall never forget that day," continues Father Ratisbonne. "After the sick woman had received Holy Communion with wonderful fervour I stayed on with her, and was standing at one side of her bed when her husband, a fanatical Hungarian Jew, came in and stood on the other side, facing me. I hardly knew what to expect, and was not without apprehension, but was amazed to see that the poor man was weeping as he spoke to his wife; he did not appear to see me, though I was facing him. Either his tears blinded him or God had rendered me invisible, for everything in this conversion was so amazing that a miracle would not have surprised me. The situation solved itself in a touching manner. The newly made Christian, who had been quite silent up till then, suddenly seized my hand with energy and placing it in that of her husband, said in a solemn voice :

" 'This is the guardian of my children; I wish him to take care of them and bring them up as Christians. Swear to me on this my death-bed that you will never attempt to go against their mother's wish.'

" 'I swear it,' sobbed the poor Jew, and he kept his word to the end."

"Our convert died the death of a saint," writes Father Ratisbonne on April 19th, 1843, to Made-moiselle Desjardins, who was in Rome at the time. "Her death will be the seed for a harvest of other conversions."

In less than six months ten more converts were in *La Providence*. But besides instructing them in

their religion, Father Théodore had begun to carry out another of his brother's wishes. Marie Alphonse had asked "that a Chapel in honour of the Blessed Virgin should be built to commemorate January 20th, 1842." And when the work of construction had begun he had written from Toulouse: "I think the opening ought to take place in the month of May . . . and if His Grace the Archbishop honours us by presiding at the ceremony, he could at the same time confirm those candidates who are already baptised."

By the grace of God there were already eight little girls eligible for Confirmation. By means of an associate of Notre Dame des Victoires, the pamphlet describing Alphonse Ratisbonne's miraculous conversion had fallen into the hands of a Jewess named Madame Marx Mayer; she had passed it on to her sister, Madame Franck, and the daughters of both had joined Elisa and Anna Würmser.

On May 1st, 1843, Mgr. Affre, assisted by Mgr. de Forbin-Janson, came to bless the outer walls as well as the interior of the Chapel where the "Memorare" is still recited daily. He baptised the catechumens before a brilliant assembly. The names of Comte de la Ferronnays, Marquis de Clermont-Tonnerre, Marquis de Dampierre, Marquis de Malécie, Comte de Melun, Comte de Villeneuve, Baronne de Barrante, Duchesse de Lorges, Comtesse de la Ferronnays, Comtesse de Gontaut-Biron, Comtesse de Caraman, Comtesse de Chastellux, and many others, figure on the list of subscribers to the Memorial, and appear

many times as godparents in the notices of the Baptisms which followed, as if the descendants of the Crusaders counted it an honour to stand sponsors to the children of a People redeemed from age-long reprobation.

Let us hasten to say that none of the newly baptised Christians¹ proved unworthy of the graces they had received.

Others, without leaving the country where they first received the light of Heaven, have worked untiringly, whether wearing the religious habit or in the world, to spread around them the knowledge and love of their Redeemer.

¹ Two of their number, Mother Lucie Marx Mayer and Mother Marie Pierre Franck, have left a most blessed memory behind them in the Congregation of Notre Dame de Sion, where they edified their Sisters for more than sixty years.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORK OF SION (1843—1847)

THE paths of Théodore Ratisbonne and Monsieur Bautain had necessarily diverged somewhat under pressure of circumstances, but nothing had as yet severed the tie of obedience between priest and Superior, when in September 1842, Monsieur Bautain sent word to the Abbé Ratisbonne to hold himself in readiness for taking the next day his final vows with the rest of the *Société de St. Louis*. Théodore, dumbfounded, ventured for the first time to resist Monsieur Bautain, and asked to be allowed at least to make a Retreat in preparation. He did not feel justified in binding himself without further reflection, by final pledges which might interfere with what God was asking of him.

The Retreat he subsequently made confirmed him in his resolve to hold back, and his action was soon justified by events for in the interval between 1844 and 1850 the newly founded Society was completely broken up and dispersed.

Failing Community life, the next best thing, to Father Ratisbonne's mind, was to get into closer contact with some of the very holy priests whose lives were then edifying Paris. Two Centres much

attracted him at this time, one which had grown up in the *Rue Cassette* under the Abbé de Ségur, and another founded by Father Libermann under the patronage of St. John the Evangelist. He eagerly offered himself to the latter group, whose members were pledged to a life of faith and self-sacrifice, and who helped each other in all their duties by prayer and spiritual conferences. But he still gave to the work he so loved, and to which God had called him, all the time it required. Conversions multiplied and it became manifestly impossible to keep the neophytes longer at *La Providence*. Besides which, these children required particular care; they were newly regenerated in Jesus Christ and needed the help of souls who had a vocation for this special work. But where were such souls to be found? With the exception of the Catechumenate formerly founded in Rome by St. Ignatius Loyola, there was no organisation in the Church with these particular aims and none of the existing ones could take on such a work. Still, God can raise up out of nothing whatever may be necessary to His Will.

The Abbé Ratisbonne, with undaunted faith, turned to Madame Sophie Stouhlen and Mademoiselle Louise Catherine Weywada, two chosen souls who had for years been his helpers, and confided to them what he believed to be the secret designs of God.

Sophie Stouhlen, born at Strasbourg on May 31st, 1789, was the only daughter of a certain Monsieur Laquiente, whose family were all good Catholics,

holding high positions in the army and the law. She had married Monsieur Stouhlen, an official in the Army Commissariat Department who died leaving no children, and his widow returned to her mother who had also lost her husband.

When Madame Stouhlen first became acquainted with Father Ratisbonne she was in bad health, very lonely and without any occupation or distraction whatever. Her home had never been a worldly one, but the atmosphere was now dull and depressing.

The priests of St. Louis not being allowed to exercise their priestly duties, Father Ratisbonne was not at that time Madame Stouhlen's Confessor, but he became her guide and consoler, and when he considered her physical health sufficiently restored gave her work in the Strasbourg schools which occupied her spare time profitably and helped her to forget her own grief by consoling the troubles of others. When once Madam Stouhlen was fairly launched in this direction she gave herself up entirely to good works, without allowing herself to be deterred by the remonstrances of her relations who tried to persuade her that her health would suffer from going to early services at the church and by working for the children.

It was a great blow to her when Father Ratisbonne left Alsace, more especially as Monsieur Bautain, on taking possession of Juilly, decided that most of the voluntary lady teachers in the schools should follow him to Paris and undertake similar work there. This left the devout widow practically alone but she con-

tinued to lead her busy and useful life. "I assure you," writes her director, "that I can thoroughly understand your feelings. . . . But ought we to complain? My child, you must be docile and submissive in the hands of God. . . . Do not stop to calculate the weight of your cross but embrace and carry it as it is. . . . No doubt to console you I could prognosticate all sorts of things as to your future, but I would rather you walked by faith in that 'dark night,'¹ where the Star of the Magi will not fail you unless you desert the signposts of Heaven and ask the people of this world to show you the right road."²

From a distance he continued to send her advice and encouragement, but without disguising the great sacrifices required of those entrusted with the care of souls, and he gradually led her to unite a spirit of prayer to the activities of her life. The announcement of the miracle of Rome, which gave Madame Stouhlen the greatest happiness, came just when her mother was peacefully departing this life.

But Father Ratisbonne allowed the year of 1842 to expire before telling his spiritual daughter of the plans he had been silently preparing, and which she, after her long and careful training, was destined to carry out. "I must confess," said Madame Stouhlen later, "that I felt very sad at parting from the little flock under my care at Strasbourg. I grieved also at leaving my country, my relations and friends. . . .

¹ Recognised theological term.—*Translator's note.*

² Letter of January 14th, 1841.

But it never occurred to me to resist the voice of authority which was for me the Will of God! Our Lord has indeed more than repaid me for my sacrifice, and rendered me a hundredfold for all I gave up!"

Although leaving her a free agent, Father Ratisbonne suggested that she should spend part of the May of 1843 in Paris. It was then that he followed the example of Our Lord who questioned St. Peter thrice before confiding to him His lambs and His sheep.

"Are you willing," said the priest to Madame Stouhlen, "to devote yourself utterly and thoroughly to the most unsympathetic class of human beings?"

"Father, I am ready to submit unreservedly to the Will of God."

"Supposing you were asked to nurse lepers in a hospital, would you be overcome by natural repugnance?"

"Father, I trust, by the help of the Blessed Virgin not to shrink from any sacrifice."

"Well, it is a question of something even less attractive than nursing lepers: the training of young Jewesses of the lower classes and making Christians of them."

Madame Stouhlen who was then fifty-four years of age decided irrevocably to accept. She had given herself absolutely to God and only returned to Alsace to sever finally the last links which bound her to the world. Rising above all human considerations she

overcame all the efforts made to retain her, and returned to settle in Paris after making over her fortune to her rightful heirs, at the express instigation of Father Ratisbonne. Humble and courageous, obedient and generous, as charitable as she was unselfish, such was the splendid Christian whom God chose to be the first Mother-Superior of the Religious of *Notre Dame de Sion*.

Next to her, but utterly different in type, came Mademoiselle Louise Catherine Weywada. She was born in Strasbourg on November 25th, 1811, the eldest of twenty-four children, and was brought up in this patriarchal group in all the simplicity and piety of the Ages of Faith. She was early trained to the duties of daughter and sister, and her qualities and aptitudes were those which the Holy Spirit praises in the "valiant woman."

Louise Catherine lived with her parents in the parish of St. Jean, the church where Father Ratisbonne said his first Mass and at which she was present. God, who turns all things to His Will, allowed a fortunate mistake to bring her into contact with the newly ordained priest. This was the answer to the prayer he offered at the beginning of his priesthood: "My God, may the soul on whom I first pour out the graces of my ministry be truly holy!"

The young girl went to him under the impression that he was her usual Confessor, and when she had found out her mistake she asked her father what she had better do.

"Was Father Ratisbonne helpful to you?" asked that true Christian, and on his daughter's replying in the affirmative he advised her to continue under the direction of a priest whose piety and virtue were the edification of all Strasbourg.

Father Ratisbonne was not long in discovering that Louise Catherine had sound judgment, a fund of practical common sense, and, above all, a simple, upright nature. He soon became convinced that if a time should come when she was no longer indispensable to her family, her life, which was quite detached from the world would be aimless and empty. He therefore advised her parents to allow her to be trained as a teacher. They consented, and Louise Catherine was sent to a Catholic school at Arbois, under lay management. This period of her existence was the beginning of a fifty years' correspondence between her director and herself, which forms perhaps the most beautiful collection of all Father Ratisbonne's epistolary treasures.

In these letters Mademoiselle Weywada considers her studies solely from the point of view of the use she will make of them; she looks upon her education as intended to fit her to become a fellow-worker of the priests of St. Louis. She was affiliated, so to speak, to their Society after her holidays of 1837.

Madame Stouhlen's house was a rallying-point for them all, but Father Ratisbonne wished there should be a specially close bond between the devout widow and Louise Catherine. Unknown to all three God

was leading them towards a future as yet hidden from their eyes.

When the scene of her many years' activities was changed, an incident somewhat lightened Mademoiselle Weywada's laborious existence. She was asked to go to Italy with one of the mistresses at the school, a Madame Verdier, who was obliged to spend the winter in a warmer climate on account of her health. Father Ratisbonne approved of the plan, more especially as the journey would ultimately bring them to Rome. He thought it a good opportunity for his spiritual daughter to acquire at its source the apostolic spirit he wished for her. On her return it was settled that she should join the other ladies who were working in Paris and at Juilly.

The two following years, 1842 and 1843, were in more than one respect years of interior as well as exterior trials. Under the influence of the Baronne de Vaux, a gradual transformation of the original statutes of the Society was taking place; the customs of a religious community began to take shape, there was a talk of making vows, and Mademoiselle Weywada hesitated to pledge herself more definitely.

Ever since the miracle of Rome her thoughts had dwelt on the works that might result from it, and the assistance she had given to the first converts had deepened her interest in them. But Father Ratisbonne would say nothing definite. He confined himself to telling her to "walk in faith like Abraham, in the spirit of sacrifice like Isaac, in the service of God

like Jacob, in tribulation like David, and in humility like Mary.”¹

The decisive signal depended on the time when Madame Stouhlen should have settled the future of the Strasbourg schools. The transfer she arranged with the “Sisters of Christian Doctrine” having been approved by Mgr. Raess, successor to Mgr. de Trévern, nothing more remained but to complete the work of which Father Ratisbonne had himself laid the foundations.

“After carefully weighing our plans with Monsieur Bautain, Father de Ravignan and Monsieur Étienne, Superior of the Lazarists,” wrote Father Théodore at this time, “I have decided to keep to my original idea of beginning on as modest and humble a scale as possible. I have rented two little empty flats in the house which faces the Chapel,² which together will cost 900 francs (£36) per annum, but am only taking them by the quarter for the time being.”³

“I arrived in Paris on September 5th, 1845,” says Madame Stouhlen in her “Notes,” “on the same day and nearly at the same hour as Mademoiselle Weywada. On the 10th we took up our abode in the apartment bespoken for us at 4 *Rue Plumet*.”

Mademoiselle Florentine Doutrelepon, a lady who had put herself under the direction of Father Ratisbonne after a course of Lenten sermons he had

¹ Letter of December 31st, 1842.

² *The Chapel of La Providence.*

³ Letter of July 28th to Madame Stouhlen.

preached at St. Merri some months before, joined them before long, and was a painstaking, persevering helper.

For two years their work consisted in training twelve girl converts, of whom some were still boarding at *La Providence*; they also instructed those adults who were touched by the grace of God and desired Baptism.

The time had now arrived for those who had resolved to consecrate their lives to this work to be made acquainted with its aims, its possible developments and the means which would be taken to accomplish them; and Father Ratisbonne sketched in bold outline the general plan he had in view.

"The work founded by Marie Alphonse Ratisbonne and his brother," writes Father Théodore, "aims first of all at the conversion of the Jews. But as the charity which inspired it has no limit, it will also interest itself in the conversion of heretics, schismatics and infidels. Other works will be undertaken, such as schools and workrooms, which, though distinct, will remain attached to the chief work and have the same aims."

Prayer, he tells them, is to be their principal weapon, and to make it all-powerful Marie Alphonse places on the lips of the neophytes, and their mothers, the words of the Saviour dying upon the Cross for ungrateful Israel: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Repeated then in a whisper it has, from that time

forward, never ceased to be chanted daily at Mass in all the Chapels of Sion after the Elevation of the Divine Victim.

Baptisms multiplied, and the children came in greater numbers, so that in 1845 the Abbé Ratisbonne decided, with the approbation of Father Dupanloup, Vicar-General of Paris, to publish a pamphlet entitled "The Work of Notre Dame de Sion." This little work contained texts from Holy Scripture interspersed with prayers for the conversion of the Jews, and pleaded their cause, so to speak, before the judgment-seat of Christian charity, from the too-long neglected point of view of their eternal salvation.

The Jewish newspapers answered by the vilest insults, and did their best, though in vain, to defame the author. "What was the meaning," it was asked, "of this work of 'Notre Dame de Sion' which had burst upon them?" They could conceive nothing more abnormal than these two names in conjunction.

The Founder explains in his "Souvenirs" his choice of a title for his little family, as it had given him anxious thought for some time. "I did not wish," he says, "to have it known by the name of a man or of a street. I was a long time deciding what to call it. One thing only I was determined upon and that was that, as the work belonged to the Blessed Virgin, it should be dedicated to Her. . . . Early one morning as I entered the Chapel of the Sisters of Charity to say Mass, I saw lying on the small *prie-Dieu* where I used to make my

thanksgiving a little book which I felt strongly drawn to open. The first word which met my eye was Sion. I felt at once that this Biblical name, occurring as it does so often throughout the Psalms, exactly described a mission intended to bring back the lost sheep of Israel into the Fold of the Church. . . . We therefore dedicated to *Notre Dame de Sion* both the ladies and the children, and soon I had the joy of seeing on the walls of our first sanctuary the words of the Psalmist : *Diligit Dominus portas Sion super omnia tabernacula Jacob.*"

By 1844 it had become clear that the young family, which according to all appearances was likely to go on increasing, would have to be moved to larger premises. After long searching it was decided to take the Houses 9 to 11 in the *Rue du Regard*, a building comprising several wings, a fair-sized courtyard, and a garden; this was to be built upon as occasion required. The joy of the children was past words when the Abbé Théodore in the June of 1845 blessed this house which was now their home. He himself left the Presbytery of the Foreign Missions and came to live almost opposite his little flock.

Mgr. Affre gave permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel which was opened on August 2nd, and allowed Benediction on Sundays and holidays, as well as Baptisms when required. "So our services were sanctioned by authority," says Madame Stouhlen, "and the work implicitly recognised by the head of the diocese."

Glancing backward over this first phase of the congregation, she writes on September 5th, 1846: "It is three years to-day since Mademoiselle Weywada and I arrived in the *Rue Plumet*. A day or two later we had two convert boarders; now we have thirty and eighty under instruction from outside. May Jesus and Mary send us all the descendants of Abraham! . . ."

These neophytes aroused great sympathy, and the most distinguished ecclesiastics came to say Mass in the little Chapel, attracted by the fame of the Director and by the many wonderful graces granted to so many regenerated souls. Mgr. Fornari, Papal Nuncio, expressed a wish to visit *Notre Dame de Sion*; he was profoundly edified by all he saw, and asked to have the origin and object of the work thoroughly explained. This suggested to the Abbé Ratisbonne a Memoir entitled "Some Reflections on the Present Condition of the Jews in France," which was sent to the Nuncio on October 15th, 1846.¹ The thoughts it contained were seed sown for a future harvest and in the hands of the Pope's envoy were not likely to be unproductive. But although spiritual graces abounded temporal difficulties were beginning to make themselves felt. It could not be otherwise in a house where no payment was required for admission. The offerings of the Faithful had to supplement personal labour, so that the daily bread of the inmates might be

¹ These "Reflections," issued privately in the first instance, were published later, with some slight alterations, under the title of "The Jewish Question."

ensured. These offerings, timidly asked of charitable Catholics, were few and insufficient, owing in part to ignorance of the needs to be met, and scarcity of funds was a difficulty which grew in proportion as the number of admissions increased. The Founder, far from wishing to reduce these numbers, would have liked to admit more. "We must not be discouraged," he says, "at receiving so little help; it is right that God's works should suffer in this way."

Nevertheless, Madame Stouhlen's diary at this time shows the pinch of extreme poverty. "We have no money to pay the baker," she writes, "or to obtain the ordinary necessities of life. May the Queen of Sion help us!"

Father Ratisbonne spared no sacrifice to lighten the common burden. In the month of November he left the little flat where he had been living and decided to take up his abode in two narrow, low-pitched rooms above the porter's lodge in the Home of the Neophytes. Under these difficult and precarious conditions it was necessary to augment both manual and intellectual labour.

"Fortunately the Blessed Virgin is our protectress," writes Madame Stouhlen. "No undertaking could warrant a greater degree of trust and confidence than ours, since She Herself suggested it to one of her privileged sons."

The time was at hand when the *Neophytat*, like all enterprises destined to be instruments of God in the Church, was to be marked deeper still with that seal

of adversity which strengthens and assures their perpetuity.

"At the time we acquired the premises in the *Rue du Regard*," says the Abbé Ratisbonne, "I employed a lawyer who passed for a good Catholic, and whom I trusted blindly. . . . I handed over to him all the money at my disposal, so that he might pay the proprietor at once. What was my surprise to find two years later that the owner had never received a penny. . . . The lawyer had gone off with everything, and I had not a single document to prove that he had ever received money from me. I did not in the least know what to do, for I was quite unaccustomed to any money dealings whatsoever. The lawyer had ruined a great many people by his dishonesty and he was prosecuted. I had to appear to give the explanations asked of me, and as I possessed neither receipts nor any document I cut a most absurd figure in the affair. My greatest trouble was that all my resources being gone I was no longer able to provide for the children I had adopted. . . ."

The Abbé Théodore was sure he could depend upon Madame Stouhlen and Mademoiselle Weywada remaining faithful to their vocation, but felt that he ought to sound their companions. He came as usual to preside at their weekly conference and began by describing how St. Vincent de Paul addressed the ladies who worked for his Foundlings: "Now, ladies," the Saint had said, "the lives of these little creatures are in your hands;" and the Abbé added that he must

say the same thing to the ladies of Sion, for a catastrophe had robbed both him and his brother of all they possessed. This being so, should they abandon the holy undertaking which had opened with such fair prospects? For his own part, there was no sacrifice he would not make rather than come to that. As a rule he had refused any fees for preaching, or had given what he did receive to the poor; but for the future he would keep all for the benefit of his children and, if need be, beg for them. Expenses had been cut down and could be still further reduced. Furthermore, he believed that the works of God were likely to take deeper root the less material support they received. But he did not wish to impose upon his fellow-workers the privations he was willing to bear himself, and he would set free any among them who did not wish to face more rigorous ordeals.

The ladies promised to persevere under all circumstances and, with one or two exceptions, all kept their word. Adversity proved an indestructible bond linking these generous souls together. The Abbé Ratisbonne, divided between his first feeling of consternation and the hopes which the constancy of his helpers had revived, was anxious to see his brother without delay and discuss with him plans to meet the situation, and he started for Laval on September 27th.

"I dreaded having to break the news of my misfortune to Brother Marie," he says, "as he was quite as much interested in the *Neophytes* as myself. I shall never forget the calm with which he received the

news. He took me up to the Crib and pointing to the straw on which the Infant Jesus was lying, he said: "There is our treasure." He seemed to rejoice in the fact that the work of Sion would not depend on financial help, and impressed upon me that, as the Blessed Virgin had Herself created it we should leave all present and future considerations in Her maternal hands.

"After discussing the poor lawyer," writes Brother Marie to Madame Stouhlen, "we went to visit the Infant Jesus, Whom we found with only a few linen swaddling-bands to cover Him. We thanked Him, with great interior consolation, for vouchsafing to strip us of all our worldly goods and render us more and more like unto Himself. We must also try to resemble Him in entire submission to our Heavenly Father's Will. My dear brother assures me you were calm and quite firm, which is just what I should have expected. Be sure that all things will turn out for the glory of God and the honour of *Notre Dame de Sion*. And we must never forget that if the arms of Sion are a Cross, at the foot of that Cross is the symbol of Divine Mercy."¹

On his return to Paris, the Abbé Ratisbonne realised that he had not even yet drained to the dregs the chalice of suffering so bravely accepted. He was called upon to pay off a mortgage on the premises of 18,000 francs (£720) before the end of the month,

¹ The badge of Sion is an "M" surmounted by a cross as on the back of the Miraculous Medal.

under pain of immediate eviction. This claim was made on January 19th; the Abbé in his poverty could not meet the demand within such a short time. But on the following day, January 20th, anniversary of the miracle, which now ranked as the Patronal Feast of Notre Dame de Sion, after baptising six Jewish children in the presence of an even larger congregation than usual, which had been attracted by rumours of trouble, he preached a sermon on behalf of his flock. After telling the story of the catastrophe he went on to say: "Must such a splendid work perish, a work which Mary marked with Her own seal on the anniversary we are commemorating to-day; must it really perish? I leave it to you to decide. Look at those poor children at the foot of the altar, each one of whom has been brought here by some marvellous chance: are they to return to haunts where they will lose the faith we have taught them? Must we see these children whom we love with a tenderness inspired by God Himself, torn from our arms? Oh! I conjure you, let this not be!"

Such words were bound to touch the hearts of all present; alms were generously given in response to his appeal and the converts were saved at any rate from being turned into the streets, though the poverty still continued to be very great.

The children could not avoid knowing the dangers which had threatened their peaceful refuge. "Among very distant memories," says one of them, "I recall the day when 'Our Father' (as Father Théodore was

designated among them) summoned us to make the sad announcement that he would perhaps be obliged to break up his sheepfold, and to tell us to pray that such a misfortune might be averted. We were in despair; we loved our Sion so dearly! It is true that poverty reigned there; lessons were a secondary consideration and we only studied when there were no pressing orders on hand for work to be sent home. But we were so happy in our family life, surrounded by so much love and encouraged by the affection of such a Father, that we would have borne any privations rather than leave."

It was at this time that Brother Marie wrote: "Great misfortunes, great dangers and great renunciations are, in the hands of the Omnipotent God, all equally certain to lead to great joys, great blessings, and great victories."

And they were now about to find by experience that temporal losses are repaid a hundredfold by gifts which come from God.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST COMMUNITY (1847—1850)

THE great ordeal of 1847 closed the secular phase of the enterprise, and the Institute of Notre Dame de Sion came into being.

One of Madame Stouhlen's greatest difficulties from the beginning had been the recruiting of Workers. It is true that the miracle of Rome had given great *éclat* to the work, but when brought face to face with very hard tasks there was generally a falling-off in either the moral courage or the physical strength of the helpers.

The admission of new members usually coincided with the departure of those who had been discouraged by the slow course of events, "so that I never seemed able to get together as many as twelve," says Father Ratisbonne, "which was the height of my ambition." But at that time he was not thinking of a Community, properly so called. "The idea of founding an Order," he declares with humility, "had never entered my head and if I had had the presumption to think of such a thing I should have rejected it as impossible."

Yet under the action of grace the sap was slowly fermenting, and was extending from the ladies to the neophytes. Two of the elder girls had

been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin on November 21st, 1843; these were Elisa Würmser (who took the name of Alphonsine) and Ermance Samuel. The latter was the daughter of a very devout convert of Strasbourg whose husband had turned her out of doors with her children on hearing of their conversion. Madame Marc Samuel had taken refuge with Madame Stouhlen and had worked steadily in the *Neophytat* ever since. As Father Ratisbonne refused to allow them to take vows Madame Stouhlen and her companions asked to be bound by a consecration which would guarantee the permanence of their union, and from that time Community life with its different degrees of priority developed almost of itself. Difference in education, however, soon divided them into two distinct categories. As it was not desirable to have wage-earners in the house of God lay-helpers became indispensable to assist the ladies who were busy teaching and training the girls. A certain mode of dress was next adopted which, though not yet a religious habit, was worn with a Crucifix suspended from the wearer's neck.

On Whit-Saturday, May 30th, 1846, a touching ceremony took place during which these Crucifixes were given to the little band. Kneeling in front of the Tabernacle they promised "to work zealously for the conversion of the Jews, to devote their time, their sufferings and their whole lives to bring about the salvation of this people by the knowledge of the Gospel, and to have no other thought or motive than the love

and glory of God. . . .” “The religious spirit seemed to germinate spontaneously among these chosen souls,” says their Director, “and I could not but believe it was inspired by God. It seemed quite clear that the Blessed Virgin wished the family of Sion to belong to Her, and more than once I noticed that events shaped themselves quite independently of my personal activities.”

Very few years had sufficed to prove to the ladies that if the work was not to suffer from human inconstancy it would be better for many reasons to be bound together in Community. At last the Abbé Ratisbonne consented to give them a series of Conferences on the Principles of the Religious Life. Reviewing the different Orders which have arisen since the Church was founded, he pointed out how each reproduced one of Our Saviour's Divine attributes and possessed a special character of its own. “Yours,” he said to his daughters, “should be the compassionate love of Jesus for the House of Israel, and His longing to draw the Jews to Himself and convert them. Never lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ was born of this nation, that the Blessed Virgin was a daughter of Israel, that the three thousand converts of St. Peter were all Jews, that the Apostles who spread the Gospel were Jews, and that, according to the Prophets, the final reconciliation of the Jews will be the greatest triumph of Christianity.”

A few days after the bankruptcy which had imperilled the very existence of the *Neophytai*, the Abbé

Ratisbonne, to his inexpressible consolation received an Apostolic Brief dated January 15th, 1847, specially addressed to him by the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX. The Brief granted very precious Indulgences to the actual and future members of the devout Community, and was destined sixteen years later to hasten the solemn Approbation which the same Pontiff gave to the Institute and Constitutions of *Notre Dame de Sion*, both of which at this time were only in process of formation. It was not until December, 1847, that the Constitutions were submitted to Mgr. Affre for examination and to the Abbé Théodore's great joy the establishment of *Notre Dame de Sion* was inserted in the list of authorised Communities in the diocese.

The Archbishop, who was present in person on the Feast of January 20th, 1848, expressed himself as honoured by being asked to offer the Holy Sacrifice on the Anniversary of the Miracle in the little Chapel of the *Rue du Regard*, and offered to return and administer the Baptisms fixed for that afternoon—a touching remembrance of the kindness of a prelate who so soon afterwards received the crown of martyrdom.

Nothing now remained to prevent Madame Stouhlen and her companions from dedicating themselves irrevocably to God, as they had so long desired to do. They pronounced their vows on September 8th, 1848, in the presence of their revered Father, at the close of a Retreat given by Father de Ponlevoy. The following year the ceremonial for "Clothings" was compiled and it has remained the same to this day. No

longer in the Community-room but before the Altar this ceremony takes place, though with all the simplicity their Founder desired. The first practical mention of the periodicity of the vows was in 1850, when Madame Stouhlen was professed for life, while the other Sisters took vows of five years', or of one year's duration. Towards the end of this same year their Father drew up a collection of wise counsels under the title of "The Rule in Practice," which was followed until 1865, when it was replaced by the "Directory."

"This 'Directory,'" he says in a Preface dated 1872, contains nothing really new. It is only the development of the 'Rule in Practice' which has been in force for twenty years at *Notre Dame de Sion*, before any 'Rule,' properly so called, was written. For in the early days of the Community simple obedience took the place of a 'Directory,' and, thanks to the good spirit of the Superiors and the filial submission of the Religious, perfect order was established and maintained."

The political upheavals of 1848, while unavoidably affecting the material conditions of the *Nèophytat*, did not check its development in poverty and obscurity; and while the children continued to pray for peace in France, Father Ratisbonne did his best to bring it about by his priestly devotion and self-sacrifice. What his work was in those days may be gathered from his correspondence.

"Imagine," he says, "a poor priest, chaplain to more than a thousand convicts, and obliged at the

same time to minister to the spiritual needs of *Notre Dame de Sion*, as well as the *Collège Stanislas*.¹ In addition to this, also, he has various duties at *Notre Dame des Victoires*, and finally, he has to preach a course of Advent Sermons at the Church of *La Madeleine*. . . . All this irrespective of extra work and unforeseen calls upon his time! . . ." In answer to his brother at Laval, who urged him to take a rest there, Father Théodore replied: "It would be easier to spur to action the horse of Louis XIV. on the *Place des Victoires* than to move anyone so tied down and wedged in as I am by my incessant work."

A serious epidemic of cholera then raging in Paris, stopped some of these pious excesses, and his own sufferings were increased by apprehensions for the children. All were spared but one victim, a good, devout girl, who had been one of the earliest inmates and who was carried off in a few hours. The Abbé, though barely convalescent, came to the poor girl, gave her the last Sacraments, and followed her humble funeral to the cemetery. This sudden death, though the cause was concealed, left a painful impression on the little flock, and added to the grief of the good shepherd. The children, unaccustomed to see him look sad, gazed up into his face as if to ask the reason. All he said to them was: "You do not know how a priest and a father can grieve!"

¹ Father Ratisbonne was Chaplain for four years at Stanislas under his friend the Abbé Goschler, who was the head of the school.

Temporal conditions were very bad. "The world does not understand the meaning of a work for regenerating Jews," says Mother Sophie Stouhlen; "those who could help us harden their hearts against the Chosen People of God and do not approve of interest being taken in them."

Surprise was expressed that charity and benevolence should be weapons used for dealing with Israelites instead of the customary railing which was directed even against Jewish converts. "It is the work of God," the Superior continues, with her steadfast faith, "and the less human assistance we get the more He will help us."

The Community was indeed unmistakably helped from on high, and was preparing itself for future sacrifices by the courageous acceptance of present poverty and mortifications.

Nothing was too hard for these valiant souls and the work of teaching was not thought incompatible with the humblest occupations. All were happy in their holy life and Providence raised up for them a few faithful friends who came to their help at times of acute distress. Despite restrictions of space they now began to admit a few pupils as boarders, and to these were added some of the most intelligent among the neophytes. This nucleus of a Higher-Grade School was given a different uniform and different Rules from those of the *Neophytat*, and these pupils were to be trained on different lines but in the same spirit. "These," as the Abbé Théodore wrote on Feb-

ruary 16th, 1849, "are the landmarks that Our Lord has set upon the path of His mercies and the day will come when Sion will spread her branches in all directions. But God's designs are not always unfolded as quickly as human impatience wishes; men are always in a hurry because life is short but God has all Eternity before Him."

The Founder was cautious and feared to jeopardise the stability of the work by too much haste, and although advances were made to him from Dijon, Bordeaux, Bayonne, Brussels, Amsterdam, and even from distant Tunis and Algiers, he had refused to make any further arrangements until he considered the Nuns he could dispose of were sufficiently trained and in greater numbers.

The signal for starting a new Branch was given in 1847, on the occasion of an offer, not, however, in itself particularly brilliant or attractive. Still, Father Théodore accepted it because he considered it a possible opening for dealings with the Alsatian Jews whom he was so anxious to benefit. The suggestion was to take the management of the school opened by a rich manufacturer named Kestner for the children of his numerous workmen. Two schoolmistresses would be required. The Abbé Ratisbonne sent them to the Bishop of Strasbourg with the following recommendation which thoroughly explains the object in view :

"MONSIGNOR" (he writes),

"I take the liberty of asking your kind interest for two of my spiritual daughters who are going to

Thann to work in a charitable institution. One, Mademoiselle Weywada, is a native of Strasbourg, and the other, Mademoiselle Marie Humann, is a certificated pupil of the *Institut de France*. . . . It would seem as if Providence were specially opening a way for us in Alsace, and who knows if God will not make use of this small beginning and make it one day into a refuge for many children of Israel? . . .”

This Mission was the first of the many separations which were to break up the original family of Sion. The parting was a great sacrifice to Mother Louise Weywada who had worked for so many years under her saintly director and guide, as well as to her companion who had not long been received into the Church and into the Community. Both were leaving an atmosphere of many spiritual privileges and frequent conversions for loneliness and the ungrateful task of teaching ignorant and totally unprepared children. But it was for the salvation of souls, and in order to counteract as far as possible the heresy and freethought propagated by the very people who were now about to profit by the abnegation and self-sacrifice of Catholic teachers. The manufacturer himself though a Protestant was quite well aware that they could not educate the children without giving them religious instruction, but his wife, a Catholic by birth, had given up her faith completely, so that it was not without difficulty that prayers, Bible history, and Catechism found a place in the recognised school pro-

gramme. The colony of workmen were good, simple folk and the Mission took fairly firm root. But a great deal of patience was necessary, for the religious influence of the Sisters did not meet with sympathy from the Directors who considered they were going beyond the terms of their agreement. The idea of giving up the work had already been considered when circumstances connected with insufficiency of Staff put an end to the Thann experiment in the September of 1849. They were, however, going to enter upon a new field of action.

The Abbé Annat, Rector of St. Merri, Paris, prevailed upon Father Ratisbonne to open a day-school for children of the middle classes. This plan was by no means incompatible with the aims of the Congregation of Sion, for the *Faubourg St. Martin*, which includes the parish of St. Merri, was at the time the headquarters of the Jewish population. An establishment which had already been started in the *Rue Michel le Comte* was handed over to the Nuns with Mother Rose Valentin as Superior.

A native of Strasbourg, where she was born on November 9th, 1816, she was a woman of great intelligence and energy, very active and thoroughly devoted to work. Her mother was a type of the "valiant woman" of Scripture, and had endowed her daughter with a fund of practical common sense and a talent for organisation which would be most useful in developing the work she was now called on to do for God. She was about thirty when she made up her mind to part

from all the members of her very large family and join the group of zealous Catholic women at the *Neophytat*, where her zeal and energy were proof against all trials.

"All will depend on your beginning humbly and quietly," said Father Théodore when he put her in charge at St. Merri. "First look after spiritual needs and organise your Staff, and later on you can think of more material considerations . . . the most valuable pieces of furniture you can possess are good and humble Nuns."

The little colony left the Mother-House on September 24th, 1849. The Sisters loaded a truck with their beds, a small table, a little linen, and some kitchen utensils, and their departure was so quiet and so much like that of a very poor family that, as their Father had wished, "No one in the *Rue du Regard* would have guessed that they were moving out, and no one in the *Quartier St. Martin* that they were moving in."

The Superior only took five francs with her for immediate necessities, but her absolute trust in God's Providence was not to remain long unrewarded. "Mother Rose," said one of her Sisters, "has such a power of attraction that she could gather together a whole town full of people." She gained an influence over the children which soon spread to their families, and she inspired such confidence that in her first year the pupils increased from thirty to a hundred. Three months later Father Annat, delighted with this satisfactory progress, induced Father Ratisbonne to open

another day-school in the *Rue Pastourel*. But the death of this good priest made a change in the conditions of daily life, and the Nuns deprived of spiritual support and without a suitable house were obliged to leave. Their seven years' work, however, had not been barren; during this time they had been brought into contact with more than forty Jewish families and no less than twenty-six Baptisms were the result. These experiments in day-schools were a step towards new and important foundations. God, who intended the Daughters of Sion to carry their Apostolic zeal one day into far distant lands, had allowed them to go through the training their Founder had wished them to have. By giving them a wide field of activity outside the original Mother-House, he intended them to realise that the education of Christian girls would form a part of the definite work of the Congregation. By this time the number of Nuns and children in the *Rue du Regard* had greatly increased; both the school and the *Neophytat* suffered from lack of space and were too cramped to develop properly. Larger premises were being looked for but up to the present in vain, as prices were out of proportion with the resources of the Congregation. In June, 1850, the Superior of the Nuns of *Bon Secours* confided to Mother Sophie Stouhlen that a rich man of good position had offered her an estate near Corbeil on the condition that a young ladies' school should be opened there simultaneously with a free school for poor children of the neighbourhood. As their vocation was sick-nursing

the Sisters of *Bon Secours* had to decline the offer, but had suggested to the charitable benefactor to turn his thoughts to the Congregation of Sion.

Such an opening seemed at first too good to be true, but the Abbé Ratisbonne received a visit from Monsieur Alexis Revenaz, one of the managers of the *Messageries Nationales* (National Steamship Companies). "I had never seen him before," says Father Théodore "and knew nothing whatever about him. He seemed a man of the world and his conversation did not suggest that he practised any form of religion, but he was evidently a most upright and fairminded person. He spread out on my table the plan of one of his estates. I thought he was about to propose a purchase and told him the Community was not rich enough to buy a country house."

"I am not asking you to buy," he said; "I am offering you a gift." This seemed to me such an extraordinary suggestion that I ventured to ask my generous benefactor to explain himself. He then proceeded to tell me that being anxious to found some charitable institution in memory of his departed wife he had resolved to give his estate of Grandbourg to a religious Community which seemed likely to do serious and permanent work. With this view he had consulted Mgr. Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, and as his Lordship's advice tallied with that of the *Bon Secours* Nuns, he had now approached the Community of *Notre Dame de Sion*."

Father Ratisbonne, deeply moved, asked Monsieur

Revenaz to come with him and inspect the classrooms and workrooms of the *Neophytat*. For some time the inmates had been praying for a house in the country and at that very moment two votive candles were burning for this intention in the large room where work was carried on with intervals of prayer and hymns.

"What are you praying for, children?" asked Father Ratisbonne, as he came in with Monsieur Revenaz.

"We are praying God to give us a house in the country, Father."

"And for what besides?"

"We are praying for whoever gives us one."

"None of this had been rehearsed beforehand," remarks Madame Stouhlen in her notes of these incidents, "and Monsieur Revenaz was very pleased with all he saw and much struck by the coincidence of the prayers which his arrival had interrupted."

Towards the end of June the Abbé Ratisbonne went to Grandbourg with some of the Nuns. There they found the remains of an old château standing in the midst of very large grounds enclosed in a boundary-wall, with farm-buildings, poultry-run, ploughed fields, and two sections of forest land on either side of a superb avenue of trees. Situated on high ground overlooking the Seine, the old estate, stretching from its own well-cultivated meadows on the one side to the Forest of Sénart on the other, seemed the embodiment of peace and tranquillity. "God's blessing is on the place," was one of Father Ratisbonne's frequent sayings. He himself loved it too and from the day he

first saw it had decided it should be his last resting-place. Mother Louise Weywada was named Superior of this foundation, and her prudence and tact were truly admirable, for her task was no light one. The spot where the school was started was not in direct communication with any populous centre, and in addition to this the Nuns, with limited facilities, had to meet the demands of a small agricultural population.

"If I were disposed to prophesy," said Father Théodore, "I should say that Grandbourg, which came into being providentially and is sustained by the Cross is destined to do great things and bear much fruit."

From that time forward whenever he was not absent on distant journeys or giving courses of sermons he divided his time between Paris and Grandbourg. He gave countless Retreats to his spiritual daughters in both houses from the year 1852 onwards. The chronicles of that time tell us that "Never did he seem so inspired; his words sank deep into the hearts of his hearers, and the eight-day Retreats, passed in silence, were days of refreshment and joy."

Three years after the installation God inspired Monsieur Revenaz with the idea of completing his work; he replaced the small temporary Chapel which no longer sufficed for its congregation by a new one dedicated to *Sainte Mathilde*,¹ and when Mother

¹ In remembrance of Madame Mathilde Revenaz.

Louise Weywada left Grandbourg in 1856 for other fields of activity, the Community numbered twenty-three Nuns and the school sixty pupils, a new building had arisen on the original construction and the establishment was known and respected by the whole neighbourhood. At one end of the long avenue of lime-trees a beautiful statue of Our Lady had been erected as a perpetual memento of gratitude; and, as a reminder of the providential acquisition of Grandbourg, Father Ratisbonne made it a rule that the Nuns should chant the *Magnificat* every Saturday after Mass—"in honour of Mary and in thanksgiving for the graces obtained by Her intercession."

One of the clauses of the deed of gift was that the Nuns should open a free school and visit the sick poor of the village. Owing to the distance Monsieur Revenaz asked for the school to be transferred to another locality midway between the Community House and the other end of the village, and suggested that a workroom should be attached to it. This plan was only put into execution later on by his daughter, Madame Lucie Pastré, who also added a refuge and, finally, in 1869, an Oratory, where the Nuns were allowed the privilege of reserving the Blessed Sacrament. From the year 1868 the little Mission of Evry ranked as distinct from that of Grandbourg. As it had been started to supply the needs described above, it was, and has remained, the humblest house in the Order, but the Founder had a special predilection for it.

"I bear you a lasting and unchanging affection," he

wrote one day to the Sisters in charge of this refuge for the children of the poor. And as in the days of their earliest beginnings, he repeated: "My blessing and my thoughts are with you now and always."

And the little group has remained faithful to its early tradition of benevolence and untiring charity, thanks to which good deeds in every form follow the footsteps of Father Ratisbonne's spiritual children.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APOSTOLATE (1842—1853)

IT would be giving a very imperfect idea of Father Théodore Ratisbonne's ministry to recount only the formation of his religious family. Far from this being his only or chief occupation the years between 1842 and 1853 were spent in the most absorbing and active work as a Missioner. "Before founding his Order," writes one of his great admirers,¹ "the Abbé Théodore was an interesting and powerful preacher. God had given him a kind of intuition in the matter of Doctrine, which he grasped with his intelligence as well as with his soul. He had been from the first endowed with a special gift for preaching. His sermons, entirely based on Holy Scripture were full of that living warmth which comes from prayer, and of him it could be truly said that *where the love of God reigns there is not only light in the intellect and fire in the heart, but the whole life is a reflection of the splendours of Divine love. . . .*"

His first sermon was preached at *Notre Dame des Victoires*. In addition to his duties at the Arch-Confraternity and his Sunday Conferences during Advent and Lent, he was soon in request in other parishes.

¹ Mgr. Doublet of Arras.

When it was suggested that he should spare himself at least to some extent, his answer was : "You should not ask me to take my rest on earth, but to work for Heaven."

He spent whole days in the Confessional regardless of fatigue, because, he was wont to say, "spiritual joy is physical health"; but he was very anxious to obtain prayers to lighten his great responsibilities. In the year 1848 his ministry began to spread further afield, owing, no doubt, in part, to the fame of the miracle. In the following years he preached no fewer than sixteen complete courses of sermons in the following churches in Paris: *Notre Dame de Lorette, St. Merri, St. Philippe du Roule, St. Sulpice, St. Roch, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Étienne du Mont, La Madeleine*, and *St. Louis d'Antin*. "When I am tired, the Blessed Virgin renews my strength," he used to declare. "It is true that when I look at what many other priests are doing I blush to mention the word 'fatigue.' Soldiers and workmen work all the year round and never murmur, while we, unworthy servants of God, complain of the least extra burden."

And the man who thus accused himself of slackness in the service of his Divine Master was not only preaching long courses of sermons at the different periods of the Church's year, but was conducting Novenas, Octaves, Triduums and Retreats, and preaching countless panegyrics of Saints, and charity sermons beyond number, not to speak of the help he was always ready to give to Religious Communities.

He was invited to Tours and afterwards to Nevers and he preached the Lenten course of 1844 at the Church of *St. Michel* at Dijon.

"Some newspapers attack me," writes the preacher, "others praise me to the skies and report each of my sermons in full; but I am indifferent to both."

The Jews, who displayed themselves conspicuously among his hearers, had a good deal to do with circulating these contradictory estimates of his preaching. He went to Versailles for the Lent of 1845, and Mgr. Raess, Bishop of Strasbourg, asked him to conduct the Month of Mary devotions there in the following May. The previous year this prelate had conferred on Father Ratisbonne an unmistakable mark of confidence and esteem by making him Honorary Canon of the Cathedral of his native town, and, by his tactful kindness the Bishop had gone far towards pacifying the resentment of the Ratisbonne family.

At that time the month of May was not universally set aside for devotions to Our Lady, and the Abbé Ratisbonne was one of the first to keep it with solemnity. "Monsignor," he wrote, "I should like the Queen and Patroness of your Cathedral to receive due homage on this occasion. For my own part I will do all in my power, and would give my life for Her if necessary. . . . I intend preaching every evening but one in the week. I count on your Lordship to make these Devotions a success, for I am not of much use alone; the hymns, the flowers, and the lights

which surround the statue of Our Lady should be made at least as attractive as the Conferences. . . ."

Father Ratisbonne, whom his Bishop received as a beloved son, had expected "to be assailed with abuse" by his family, but he was met with smiling faces, and even his old uncle was quite affectionate and attentive.

"I have begun to explain the work of *Notre Dame de Sion* to my family," he writes, "and they are touched to hear of the good done to our dear children. They are even getting gradually accustomed to the idea of my brother Alphonse's vocation. Their anger has evaporated, and as time goes on and the miracle is justified by facts, they feel only admiration and surprise."

"Give thanks to God," he writes to his Daughters on May 10th; "the Month of Mary seems to have touched the hearts of the whole town."

Later on he reassures one of the converts who had dreaded the hostility of the Jews: "So you thought they would stone me! . . . On the contrary, many of them came to hear me preach, and if they continue to do so I do not despair of winning some of them over to Jesus Christ. . . ."

This month of grace ended in the greatest fervour and devotion.

"It was time I took my departure," wrote the preacher after quite a sad farewell, "or they would never have allowed me to go. . . ."

All trace of past unpleasantness had disappeared, thanks to Father Ratisbonne's charity and uncon-

querable amiability, which then, as always, made him so successful in his dealings with souls.”¹

The year 1845 also ended with exceptional success in Bordeaux. The seating space in the Cathedral would not hold the congregation, and literally hundreds of Jews were present. “I have just heard that the Chief Rabbi has publicly forbidden the Jews to come to my sermons,” wrote Father Théodore, “which makes me hope that they will come in even greater numbers than before.”²

The truth is that in each town a kind of magnetic influence seemed to attract his former co-religionists to his pulpit, as if they had to be convinced by the evidence of their own eyes and ears that the man who proclaimed the Divinity of Jesus Christ with so much love and conviction was really the same who used to be so prominent among themselves. Mgr. Donnet wished the preacher to be solemnly invested as Honorary Canon of the Cathedral while the course of sermons was still proceeding, and on December 29th Father Ratisbonne left Bordeaux, tearing himself regretfully away “from many friends, children and chosen souls,” as well as from his kind and hospitable host the Abbé de Salinis. Two months later he was preaching at Cambrai, where an extraordinary number of penitents flocked to his Confessional. At the invitation of Mgr. Level, Superior of *St. Louis des Français*, his friend of bygone days, Father Ratis-

¹ Father d'Angély in his “Souvenirs” of Mgr. Ratisbonne.

² Letter of December 4th to Madame Stouhlen.

bonne had the great happiness of preaching a Lenten course in Rome in 1851. This was his second visit to the Holy City, but he had never had an audience of Pius IX. When he arrived on March 1st, after a long journey and a very bad crossing, the Pope had already given his blessing in the Throne-Room of the Vatican to the hundred and fifty preachers of different nationalities who preached daily, each in his own language. Although Father Ratisbonne was represented at this gathering by Mgr. Level he was naturally anxious to receive the Papal blessing as soon as possible, which he did in an audience on March 9th.

The course of sermons starting on the first Sunday of Lent was now due to begin, and did not seem likely to resemble those which had preceded it. In accordance with the Roman custom, the French preacher was only to be heard on Sundays and twice in the week. At first the Abbé Ratisbonne was somewhat intimidated. "I have never felt more helpless in my life," he wrote to his brother; "I have to preach before one of the most distinguished congregations in Europe, important not in numbers only, but by their exceptional intelligence and piety; I feel dismayed at the task before me, and I can only exclaim with the prophet: *A-a-a! Ego puer sum!*"¹

But by the end of the second week his words appeared to be inspired. The vast and beautiful edifice presented an amazing spectacle filled with a congre-

¹ "And I said: Ah, ah, ah, Lord God: behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child" (Jeremias, chapter i., verse 6).

gation of all ranks and conditions, wearing costumes of every kind and colour, from the habit of the friar and the cassock of the priest to the glittering uniform of the Army of Occupation. But, as Father Théodore said: "Mere external success is of no value; what really matters is that every soul should have carried away something to feed on and profit by."

The result became apparent at the end of the Easter Retreat, when the number of communicants rose to double that of preceding years. The preacher had prayed for strength and light in his ministry, at the Altar of *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte*, and seldom had he felt himself so unmistakably assisted from above. It was at that Altar that he prayed also for Sion and drank in fresh hope for the salvation of Israel.

At his first audience Pius IX. had spoken at length of all the efforts he intended making to break down the existing barriers between the Jews of the Papal States and the rest of the Christian population. "But," the Pontiff went on to say, "the very people who begged so long for this freedom have refused to profit by it now it is offered them."

This was quite in accordance with facts, for the Jews, who were now at liberty to live wherever they pleased, continued to crowd into the Ghetto; neither they nor the Christians were as yet ripe for any change of existing conditions. On April 27th Father Ratisbonne had a final audience of the Holy Father who blessed him abundantly with many encouraging words, and confirmed the special mission given to him

by his predecessor, Gregory XVI. From his first visit to Rome Father Théodore had returned with the decoration of St. Sylvester, and on this occasion he was awarded, on the Holy Father's personal initiative, the title, very seldom conferred in those days, of *Apostolic Missioner*. "And this," says the faithful son of the Church, "is the only title in accordance with my tastes, ideas, and vocation."

All his life he prized this honour above all others, as the link binding him most closely to the Holy See.

The last course of Lenten sermons he preached out of Paris was at Amiens in 1858. The idea of dividing his time for two months between Mgr. de Salinis (who had created him Honorary Vicar-General) and the Abbé Gerbet, future Bishop of Perpignan, was an attractive prospect, but in the very Catholic town of Amiens, overflowing with Communities and charitable undertakings, and where Father de Ravignan and the Abbé Combalot had lately been preaching, his task was too easy, and Father Ratisbonne would have preferred more strenuous missionary labours in some less favoured centre.

In 1845 Mgr. Dupont des Loges had lent him the Episcopal Palace in Metz for the Novena of the Assumption and had expressed a wish to see the work of Sion established in his diocese, where many Jews attended the Christian schools. Father Ratisbonne preached in Boulogne, Marseilles, and Nancy, as well as in Belgium, and the cause of charity had many

times taken him as far as Brussels, Ghent, Namur, Liège, Louvain, and other towns.

He has left no written sermons. He preached out of the abundance of his heart, but by some thousand notes found among his papers we see that in all his sermons there was some leading thought which had been well prepared and meditated beforehand.

Filled with the spirit of God his most ardent desire was to enkindle in men's hearts "the fire which Jesus Christ came on earth to bring. . . . The motive of each of God's works is love," he used to say, "and all the actions of men should spring from the same motive."

Solitude and silence were essential to him when he wished to renew the vigour of his own soul and garner up the spiritual treasure he gave out so lavishly to others. Sometimes we hear of him following a Priests' Retreat, sometimes he is at *St. Acheul*, or at the novitiate of Laval, at *Notre Dame de Liesse*, or *Notre Dame de Verdelaïs*; at other times he even goes to a Trappist monastery in the vain hope of being isolated and unknown. He frequently asks for prayers from the Carmelites as well as from his own spiritual Daughters, for he declares that prayer is the help he needs most, and he shows the esteem in which he holds their vocation when he adds: "Nuns by their prayers preach with the preacher, fight with the soldier, teach with the doctor and triumph with the martyr."¹

¹ Memorandum.

Baptisms, receptions into the Church, instruction of converts and direction of persons living in the world, complete the list of his activities in Paris. During these fruitful years the annals of the Congregation record the Baptism of entire families and the Abbé Ratisbonne was the priest who usually officiated. He loved to dwell in his sermons on the wonders of God's mercy in bringing souls by so many different paths to the feet of their Redeemer—some coming to Jesus Christ after long suffering and pain, others because for them the joys of this world had quickly turned into dust and ashes.

Among the Baptisms which followed each other in quick succession that of Madame Eugénie Foa created a great stir in literary circles, but none, perhaps, caused so much astonishment as that of the pianist Hermann Cohen. He was received into the Church on August 28th, 1847, in the Chapel of *Notre Dame de Sion*. It was there he made his first Communion on the following 8th of September, and two years later he entered the Novitiate of the Discalced Carmelites at Bordeaux. Hermann's conversion had the same effect on devotion to the Blessed Sacrament as Alphonse Ratisbonne's had had on devotion to Our Lady, that is to say, both conversions were the signal for an immense increase of fervour towards Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, besides being a proof of the merciful designs of God upon His chosen people. The grace of conversion was, however, not limited to the Jews, but given to heretics and schismatics as well.

More than one great personality, attracted by the name and fame of Father Ratisbonne, came to learn of him by precept and example how to respond to the appeal of Truth and how to make the great renunciation.

Among those converted from intellectual error was Dr. Albert Hetsch a disciple of Hegel and member of the University of Tübingen, who did fruitful work in the Church of God, and became later Superior of the *Petit Séminaire* of Orleans and a distinguished colleague of Mgr. Dupanloup. It was most providential that Hetsch should have been brought into contact with Father Ratisbonne, for he found in him just the prudent and patient guide he needed to ward off discouragement and stimulate his wavering will. The young Protestant, who had vainly tried to persuade himself that he could become a Catholic without having to sacrifice his career or break his heart was still hesitating to take the decisive step after six years of uncertainty. At moments of great stress of mind, his Director used to send him to pray at St. Sulpice knowing that even a priest's advice is powerless to win the final victory. At last the abjuration was fixed to take place on April 16th, 1847. "At that time," writes the biographer of the Abbé Hetsch, "there existed in a quiet and lonely district of Paris, surrounded by large gardens, a poor tumble-down wooden chapel, since destroyed by time, but dear to many souls as the birthplace of great work done for God. . . . It was there in the Chapel of

Notre Dame de Sion, that Father Ratisbonne received Albert Hetsch into the Church . . . all was done quietly and almost, so to say, secretly."

Thus the Nuns and neophytes shared with these newly baptised and newly converted Christians that joy which the Angels feel when one sinner repents; and none was happier than their Father, although his rejoicing was not without alloy. He knew too well the snares and persecutions which Satan prepares for those whom Divine Mercy has transformed, and his heart was heavy when he thought of all the obstacles their perseverance would encounter, especially in the case of Jews. Meanwhile the Jewish Press on more than one occasion tried to cast aspersions on Father Ratisbonne's work. "He stops at nothing," said these newspapers; "nothing daunts him, neither sun, rain, nor mud, nor even contempt or blows."

Under transparent allusions they denounced the proselytism of "the vampire who multiplied conversions in order that his own might be forgotten," thus unwittingly giving him the highest form of praise. The Rabbis of the Synagogue who had been anxiously watching for an opportunity to incriminate him and hinder the work of his ministry, prosecuted him twice;¹ but like his Divine Master he left the tribunal innocent, though bearing the marks of the scourge.

"Charity thinketh no evil," and Father Ratisbonne had been beguiled into receiving gratuitously some children who were unworthy of his kindness. This

¹ At the Douai and Riom Assizes in 1861.

was his sole crime in Jewish eyes. He was uniformly gentle and unperturbed in face of the animosity and insults which pursued him. "If the Jews behave as they did eighteen hundred years ago," he wrote, "we, on our side, should act as did the Apostles in those days, blessing instead of cursing, praying for blasphemers, and rendering good for evil. Who knows? There may be a St. Paul among those who are stoning us. Now more than ever is the time to say, *Pater dimitte illis!*" ("Father, forgive them," etc.).

One day, about fifteen years later, a man on the staff of a newspaper which had insulted him even more than most came in person to Father Théodore.

The journalist no longer aggressive came as a suppliant. "Sir," he said to the priest, "I have written a great deal against you, as you perfectly well know. Yet it is to you I venture to turn. . . . I have lost my situation . . . I have children . . . I am in want . . . I implore you do not turn me away."

Father Ratisbonne had just received an alms given for any good work he might choose. Silently, and without hesitation, he placed the money in the hand of the man who had begged for his children. The journalist was overwhelmed at a greatness of soul which could forget past injuries in pity for the aggressor's present needs.

The number of Baptisms visibly increased after the opening of the Home for Girl Converts, and this soon caused the Founder and his brother to think seriously of a similar establishment for boys. But there were

neither available funds nor a suitable Staff for such an undertaking. They began, therefore, by passing on what boys were sent them to the *Petit Séminaire de St. Nicolas* and other Christian institutions, until this arrangement proved too expensive.

Father Ratisbonne then set himself to find some pious laymen who would work in the same way as the first ladies in the *Rue Plumet*. He thought he had discovered exactly what he wanted when his unfortunate bankruptcy reduced him to penury and put an end to all development; other means had to be found to carry on the work already begun.

The Baronne de Barante having approached Monsieur de Salvandy, the Minister of Education, there seemed some hope from that quarter of a permanent institution being founded, but the project fell through owing to the proposed premises being too small.

In 1849 support was offered from Rome, not only for this second branch of the *Neophytat*, but for a Community of priests who would work entirely in Jerusalem for the conversion of the Jews.

The time, however, was not yet ripe for this. But the same year the reinstallation of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and in 1852 the formation of the "Oriental Society" seemed to point to a possibility of work in the Holy Land which the Sion Communities might sooner or later have to undertake. Father Marie Alphonse, who carefully followed the progress of the *Neophytat*, was convinced that such work lay ahead of them. In his eyes it was in Jerusalem that the tent of

Sion was ultimately to be fixed, and this thought was in his mind when, even as a novice, he wrote to Madame Stouhlen: "I ask of God, if it be His Holy Will, that I may be one day the least of the workers in your Congregation."¹

This attraction seemed stronger than ever at the time of his ordination (September 28th, 1848); he felt then as if the grace conferred on him by the priesthood should be poured out on the Congregation which his conversion had suggested, as well as on the Holy City to which he felt irresistibly drawn. It appeared as if his heart's desire was about to be fulfilled, for he was sent by his Superiors to Paris, to the *Rue de Sèvres*, and from there he could help to a certain extent in the management of the *Neophytat*, in fact, he generally took his brother's place when the latter was called away to preach. He also had a great deal to do with the arrangements for the Boys' Home at No. 3 *Rue Duguay-Trouin*.

This new establishment was dedicated to St. Peter, and on October 16th, 1852, Father Ratisbonne, with the two helpers whom God had sent him, left his humble lodgings in the *Rue du Regard* to take possession of the house which he and his priests were to occupy until 1880. Only the angels of God know what holiness was sheltered within those walls which cannot speak to tell the tale, and what a living centre of grace was there for the assistance of souls! The first pupil to be admitted was Alphonse Samuel, a boy who when

¹ Letter of September 28th, 1845.

quite a child had been turned out of his home with his mother and sister. He was soon joined by two sons of a Polish Jew, a Colonel who had been killed in war.

In the meantime Father Marie had been named Professor at the College of Vaugirard. He was feeling very perplexed as to his future and circumstances seemed against him. He confided his perplexities to his brother, begging him to lay before God in prayer all the arguments for and against a resolution which he felt had to be taken. After consulting experienced men who were unanimously in favour of the transfer, the Abbé Ratisbonne decided to go to Rome and seek for light. "I started full of anxiety," he says, "and prayed God rather to let me be shipwrecked than allow me to take any step contrary to His designs." At the audience given him on December 4th, he began by explaining at length to the Pope his views on the Apostolate of Sion, as well as the help he looked for from both branches of his religious family.

Pius IX. listened with fatherly kindness to these outpourings of zeal, and gave his blessing to the Congregation of Priests as yet to be born, and which his own wish was calling into being. As a special favour he bestowed the Brief of Encouragement and Praise on the new enterprise. The Abbé Ratisbonne then proceeded to the more delicate matter of Father Marie's future. After hearing all that Father Théodore had to tell the Sovereign Pontiff concluded the audience by saying: "First make quite sure what

is the Will of God on this point, and then let no human considerations whatsoever deter you from fulfilling it."

This was indeed how the two brothers wished to act. After leaving the Vatican, Father Théodore went to the *Gesù* where he found Father Roothan more grieved than surprised, for during his ten years in the Society Father Marie had often spoken to his Superiors of his longing to work for the conversion of his former co-religionists. However much the Sons of St. Ignatius may have regretted losing him there was no doubt that the strong attraction of the fervent priest was a sign that his vocation came from God. Besides which his leaving them in no way entailed a diminution of that esteem and confidence which, with the years, had grown up between the Society of Jesus and the Community of *Notre Dame de Sion*.

The Abbé Ratisbonne returned to France strengthened and comforted, and bringing with him a letter from the General of the Jesuits giving Father Marie full liberty to leave. Great was the joy of the Nuns when, at a general meeting on December 17th, they learned that the work of the conversion of the Jews was to receive a fresh impetus from the union of their two Fathers. Early next morning Father Marie unable to face the ordeal of farewells left Vaugirard as if he were only going to say Mass in some neighbouring church. As he entered the parlour of the *Rue du Regard* he covered his face with his hands and when he raised his head tears were streaming from his eyes.

"I should never have had the courage to leave the Society," he said, "if I had not loved Sion so much."

The fact of his leaving the Jesuits, as was to be expected, was censured as well as approved.¹ Some ascribed it entirely to the initiative and influence of Father Théodore. But it would seem, on the contrary, that the latter was rather opposed, if anything, to his brother leaving and had only been the intermediary between Father Marie and those in authority. A few days later (on February 12th, 1853) he wrote to a friend: "Thanks be to God, and thanks also to the General of the Jesuits who has but one thought, and that is the glory of God, my brother has now become my colleague, my fellow-worker, and my *socius*. . . . The opinion of the world matters little. The same people who loudly censured my brother for entering the Society now as loudly blame him for leaving it. But it is enough that God knows why He put him there and why He has removed him." The Society of Jesus could not fail to sympathise with a work which their Founder had so much desired to carry out in the early days of his apostolate. We know that St. Ignatius and his followers originally intended to settle in the Holy Land and devote themselves to the conversion of Jews and infidels, and if they did not fulfil this ideal it is only because circumstances prevented them from doing so. The Jesuits

¹ "The Society of Jesus in France: the History of a Hundred Years, 1814-1914," by Rev. Father Burmichon, S.J., vol. ii., pp. 414 ff. Beauchesne, 1915.

could but rejoice to see the project of their spiritual Father revived and realised after a lapse of three hundred years by the Community of Sion. They had certainly helped towards it by training Father Marie Alphonse to the religious life from the time of his conversion, and had been still more providentially wise in refusing to receive Father Théodore who at one time had also wished to become a Jesuit. What is more, the attraction which the Founder of *Notre Dame de Sion* felt for the Society of Jesus was never lessened. When nearing the end of his life, he wrote in his "Souvenirs": "I have loved and admired the Jesuits ever since I learned to know them. Who that truly loves the Church can fail to be attracted by them? They are marked out for persecution by the enemies of God, and they are of those to whom Our Lord said: *Men shall hate you for My Name's sake. . .*"

The Chapel assigned to the use of the little Community of Priests in the *Rue Duguay-Trouin* was blessed on June 29th, 1853; four of the boys who had been previously baptised made their First Communion at the Mass which followed, and another was baptised the same day. After two years of experience and painstaking endeavour during which time more and more helpers joined the work, it was consecrated canonically by Mgr. Sibour and finally, in the year 1857, the Community of Priests of *Notre Dame de Sion* was officially included in the diocese. It has been said of the Church that her

destiny on earth is to keep on for ever making fresh beginnings. Such also, it would seem, was the way destined by Divine Providence for Father Théodore in the formation of the Priests who came to share his work. He spent thirty years over the task without growing discouraged or allowing himself to be turned from his purpose by obstacles; his zeal remained unabated, and his faith in his mission undimmed. He kept it in view to the end of his life, and when spoken to about it said: "I shall never cease to pray, to wait and to hope. . . ."¹

His first companions, deterred by the uncertainty of the Community's material prospects, forsook him, making excuses such as the guests offered in the Gospel Parable. Father Théodore was disappointed but not discouraged. "I have received a twofold grace," he tells us; "I have no temptation to murmur, even for a moment, and I am able to accept the Will of God without understanding it. . . . My only wish is to obey that Sovereign Will in all things. . . . My hopes are stronger than ever. . . ."² He took comfort in the words of a holy priest, who said to him: "If the fruits of an undertaking are in proportion to its trials then much good may be prophesied of your Community."

The Boys' Home eventually developed into a small college of fifty children, some of whom lived in Paris and others near the Convent at Grand-

¹ Letter of July 14th, 1849.

² Letter of July 10th, 1859.

bourg. Father Théodore, faced with repeated disappointments, thought more than once of affiliating the fellow-workers who had remained faithful to him to some other Congregation. But Father Étienne, Superior of the Lazarists, Father Roothan, General of the Jesuits, and other eminent ecclesiastics, dissuaded him, and seemed firmly convinced that God had great blessings yet in store for his Community.

Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda, showed himself unmistakably in favour of the work when Father Ratisbonne was sent for to Rome in 1870 by the Father-General of the Augustinians, who thought that there was a chance for his own Order being restored in France if allied to the Fathers of *Notre Dame de Sion*. "Sion is the special work of Our Lady," said the Cardinal, "and the Congregation of the Fathers is necessary to complete it. You have been chosen for a work which has its own spirit and characteristics, and of these you are the guardians. . . . The mission of converting the Jews is the personal work of Jesus Christ. Apostles have been sent to all the quarters of the globe. . . . Our Lord Himself preached to the Jews. . . . It is a special mission, and it has been confided to you, and that is why I am not in favour of your allowing your special vocation and mission to be absorbed in any other Order."

Father Théodore accepted this decision in all humility, though it apparently sterilised his efforts.

"Perhaps God intends my tomb," he writes, "to be the foundation on which one day the Priests of

Notre Dame de Sion will be established and will develop."

Thus it was to be, as time has proved. The seed which our revered Father sowed and cultivated to the last has borne fruit despite the bitter wind of persecution; the little family has grown and with its growth its strength and energy have increased. . . . For Communities of Religious are the arrows which the Bowman keeps in reserve in His quiver. When the voice of many apostles shall have resounded to the uttermost ends of the earth, then will be multiplied those chosen by God to preach the Gospel to that nation which was the first to be called and shall be the last to respond.

CHAPTER IX

THE MOTHER-HOUSE (1853)

“OUR special Work can only develop under cover of another,” wrote the Abbé Ratisbonne in 1851, and in fact this was what was gradually happening. After being in existence for ten years, the Community was about to pass through a period of transformation, and although the aim of the Congregation remained unchanged, it was now to be attained by other means. Before we leave the story of the *Neophytat*, so dear to the first group of Nuns, we must glance once more at the record of obstacles surmounted and the battles fought in prayer and patience by those chosen souls who gave their lives to the work from its earliest beginnings.

“We have to reckon with very exacting parents,” records Madame Stouhlen in her Diary; “devoid of all Christian charity themselves they imagine we have some hidden and mercenary motive for wishing to get hold of their children.” Indeed there was a very strong motive no less a one than the salvation of souls; but this was quite inexplicable to these Jewish families, and the greatest care was required in dealing with them. The converts were of all ages and some did not

even know how to read or write. A great deal remained to be done before such defective education could be supplemented; it was no easy matter to awaken a sense of the supernatural there where the whole soul was absorbed by the love of the things of earth, but perhaps the most difficult task of all was to make insubordinate and self-willed children obey. The grace of Baptism, however, and the work of the Holy Spirit brought about rapid and satisfactory progress. No effort was spared to direct the children's souls in the way that would help them most; they received a solid religious instruction, approached the Sacraments frequently, and made an annual Retreat; everything was done to smooth the way along the right path.

"What struck us most at first," say the earlier converts in their "Souvenirs," "was the mingled dignity and sweetness of 'Our Father,' as we were taught to call him. In him we saw nothing that was human, but only the gentle, quiet majesty of the priest. . . . We looked upon him as a being apart, and quite superior to the rest of mankind, as to one whose life was given up to loving, enlightening, and training us. *Suffer little children to come unto me*, he seemed to be saying with Our Lord. When he was praised for his kindness, he would repeat these words of his Master: *Call no man good*, adding that a priest who is daily incorporated into Jesus Christ, who is Goodness itself, should necessarily reflect some ray of His infinite loving kindness. We were cared for in every sense of the

word and encouraged to make progress in knowledge as well as in good conduct. Every Sunday our Father presided over an assembly of the whole school, when a general summary of the conduct and work of the week was read aloud. Indulgent to slight shortcomings he was inexorable where there was any fault against charity. The punishment most dreaded was being deprived of his visits. . . . Oh, how we used to beg and pray of him to forgive us when this was threatened! . . . No one ever inspired such fear mingled with so much filial affection as our beloved Father, or managed to combine so much sweetness with so much firmness. His visits were stimulating in workroom and class alike. On these occasions anyone could ask him questions which he always answered in his kindest and most fatherly way. Each child was personally known to him; he could read souls and often answered an unspoken thought to the intense amazement of those present. . . ." He advised the Nuns to make the children familiar with the beauties of Holy Scripture, and loved to hear them repeat portions of the Bible, saying that these inspired words, while raising the mind to Heaven, leave nourishment, light, and strength in the soul and help it through times of darkness and trial. This kind Father made himself "all things to all," carefully suiting his advice and counsel to the capacity of each one. During his absences when preaching in the provinces he would write frequently to his flock, either collectively or separately. Some of these letters written in advance

and dated from distant, unknown places, were posted on the way so that, though absent in body he might be present in spirit in the midst of his family.

Meanwhile the admissions to the *Neophytat* had slackened in proportion as the Synagogue more resolutely opposed Christian propaganda. This opposition was vigorously carried on by rich Jews, who founded and maintained schools to which they enticed the children of their poorer co-religionists. Their classrooms soon filled up, for in addition to wellnigh invincible prejudice there was a natural shrinking from all the annoyances put in the way of those who became Christians of their own free-will. At these times Father Théodore would maintain a spirit of confidence in his Daughters. "Abraham did not see with his own eyes the realisation of the Divine promises," he would say to them; "but after leaving all things, he followed the known Will of God step by step. It is certain that the Lord in His mercy is watching over the remnant of Israel, and when the wind of the Spirit blows everything will be in readiness to further the work of grace, and the trials of beginnings will certainly increase final rewards."

The number of pupils in the Boarding-School was increasing however and would have been even greater but for the obstacles which hindered its development. The premises of the *Neophytat* were too small for this purpose, and, besides being very unattractive externally did not lend themselves in any way to projects of additional building. New quarters were

an absolute necessity. This was a serious matter, but it had to be faced and some solution found, although the Community had no funds and looked to Providence only for help. Father Théodore and his brother had long searched in vain for something suitable, when one morning, as they were crossing the *Rue Notre Dame des Champs*, then intersected by factories and rustic-looking houses, their attention was drawn to an attractive property. There were no indications of its being either for sale or to let, and the owner gave them no encouragement whatever. "Nevertheless, prompted by some inexplicable impulse," writes Mother Sophie Stouhlen, "or rather inspired by the Blessed Virgin, they asked to be allowed to inspect the property as well as a fair-sized piece of land which comprised three other houses standing in their own grounds. The inspection was prolonged and everything seemed most suitable. At last Father Marie took a sudden resolution and the brothers asked to buy the place; the owner bewildered by his own unaccountable change of feeling agreed, and before they parted a verbal contract had passed between them which concluded the transaction." Of course these were only the preliminaries as the house in the *Rue du Regard* had to be disposed of before anything more was done. The Oratorian Fathers were only too glad to take it over. They had very precious memories connected with the Chapel of the *Neophytat*, for in 1852 Father Pététot, surrounded by the small band of his first followers, had said a Mass of the Holy Ghost there before

their formal reunion. The transfer was effected to the pious satisfaction of both parties and on August 6th, 1853, all the members of the little family of Sion gathered for the last time round their beloved Altar where more than two hundred Jews had been baptised and twenty-two Protestants (for the most part men and women of learning and distinction) had abjured their errors. Tears were in many eyes when Father Théodore addressed them.

"I know not, my children," he exclaimed, "whether we should repine or rejoice. Joy and grief, though so opposed to each other, are both legitimate, and are seldom far apart. In this life we see the Cross even behind what consoles us, or, rather we should say that in the Cross is our consolation. . . . It is a cross to leave this Altar, these walls which have been witness to a very real happiness, and this house, a tiny unit in the great City, but where so many friends have been gathered together. If I feel a temptation to sadness I must remember that the Divine Will is paramount; I say to myself that we are only leaving this place because we have outgrown it and one glance towards the Sion which is growing while this one diminishes turns all my grief to gladness. It is written in the Book of Kings that the Ark made many voyages before resting in Jerusalem on Mount Sion. The sacred writer adds that at each stopping-place victims were sacrificed amid rejoicings and hymns. You too have sacrifices to make before you find yourselves in a settled home, but I ask you to offer them up with the sweet savour of thanksgiving

and joy.”¹ And at his request this joy and thanksgiving found expression in a fervent *Magnificat*.

When it was time for the converts to leave, Father Ratisbonne, not without emotion, gave the signal by the following fervent blessing: “May the Angel of Sion, who is leaving this spot go with you on your way! May the spirit of Sion, which is peace, sweetness, and abnegation, be with you wherever it may please Providence to send you! May the piety and fervour which you have gained in this sanctuary be perpetuated throughout the ages! and may the Giver of all good gifts Himself lead you to the new Sion, and make you prosper there from generation to generation!”

The ground on which the Mother-House was to be finally established had been sanctified by the footsteps of the Saints. When the crowds came at the call of St. Denis to be baptised the Bishop transformed the Temple of Mercury at the foot of Mount Lucotitius (now the *Montagne Ste. Geneviève*) into a sanctuary dedicated to Mary under the name of *Notre Dame des Vignes*. Centuries passed, and the vast spaces quickened by the prayers and preaching of the Apostle of Gaul were left in comparative solitude. Wheat-fields replaced vineyards, and the name of *Notre Dame des Vignes* was altered to that of *Notre Dame des Champs*. Benedictines, Carthusians, and eventually Carmelites, divided between them the outlying terri-

¹ Collections of addresses delivered in the Chapel during 1853.

tory. Then the tempest of revolution swept them all away to exile, prison, or to the scaffold, and the name of *Notre Dame des Champs* would perhaps have fallen into oblivion, had it not been given in the eighteenth century to a road near the Luxembourg Gardens. This road extends on the west to what was once the boundary of the Carthusian enclosure. Life ran its normal course above the tombs of the monks, until votaries of the different arts began to seek peace and seclusion in this ancient haunt of prayer, and such well-known artists as Ivan Signol and Rosa Bonheur established their studios on a portion of the ground now occupied by the Convent of *Notre Dame de Sion*.

It was a laborious undertaking, the installing of the Community in their new home. While Father Théodore was busy making rules and settling all that pertained to the interior of a convent, Father Marie superintended all outside work. He had the statue of Our Lady, which had been the ornament of the first Sion, set up in a place of honour, and, thanks to his gift for organising and directing a temporary Chapel was soon arranged—"until such time," said Mother Sophie, "as the piety of our Fathers will find adequate expression by the erection of a magnificent sanctuary."¹ This period of reconstruction was also one of great development. The Mother-House be-

¹ The first stone of the present Chapel was laid on June 29th, 1864, and it was completed in 1878. The Mother-House was commenced in 1859.

came the centre from which emanated the spirit which was to characterise every House of the Congregation. Subjects for possible, distant foundations were recruited from the Noviciate, and the nucleus of a school soon grew and developed under the able management of Mother Emilie Lagarmitte. One of the lately acquired houses, which was quite distinct from the *Neophytat*, was used for this purpose, with Mother Emilie as headmistress, while Mother Rose Valentin became head of the school at Grandbourg; each of these Nuns giving her special Mission a definite impetus and character of its own. Both were Alsations endowed with practical common sense and a talent for organising, and in addition to this were women of high ideals and great intelligence; both, also, had the necessary experience of the world, where both had struggled and suffered. Mother Rose had the more forcible character of the two, Mother Emilie's temperament was more retiring. God had endowed them with a power of influencing others for good, which Mother Rose used with all the strength of her will and Mother Emilie with all the charm of her heart and mind.

Mother Rose who was destined to work farther afield only remained at Grandbourg for five years. When she left in 1859 there were more than a hundred and twenty pupils in the school who had come from far and near attracted by some sort of magnetism. Mother Emilie's work in Paris developed more slowly; it was difficult for such an institution to win a place for

itself among so many older and better known establishments; nevertheless, the school at the Mother-House continued to make progress. Father Théodore after ten years of teaching and training children in Strasbourg was well qualified to make his spiritual Daughters love their work of education and fulfil it worthily.

"Of all the missions entrusted to women," he used to say to them, "there is none nobler than the bringing up and educating of children. The words 'bringing up' express the whole meaning of education; we must 'bring them up' to the path which leads to Heaven. The world does not understand the expression, but religion sees the sublime significance of the words. It is the work which Our Lord specially commended and in a sense consecrated when He said: *He that receiveth one such little child in My Name, receiveth Me* (Matt. xvii. 5). "There are forms of charity for the relief of every kind of misfortune," he would say, "but the holy and devoted workers whom it calls into being have but a restricted sphere of action. Sacrifices made in the cause of childhood have, on the contrary, far-reaching effects which often affect future generations. The work of education, in its true sense, means training and cultivating not only the body but the soul and the mind of the child, and we shall esteem our mission at its true value if we remember that by it homes are sanctified, society is purified, joy and consolation given to the Church, and the number of the Redeemed multiplied."

Father Théodore then proceeds to define his ideal of a school of *Notre Dame de Sion*. "It should be," he says, "a family of which the Superior is the Mother; a centre of Christian wisdom where under the care of Nuns living together in perfect union and submissive to authority true piety and solid virtues are cultivated, and where nothing is omitted to give a sound and comprehensive education to the pupils."

He wishes the children of Sion, who have been taught the secret of true happiness, to prove it more by deeds than by words; they are to set a good example which no one who comes in contact with them can help seeing. He lays great stress on their being taught the right kind of piety, that is to say they are to avoid unnecessary gloom and austerity and to be as indulgent and charitable as possible to others. It may surprise some to know that in the regulations for the schools of Sion there is no section headed *Punishments*; not that Father Théodore thought they would never be needed but because he wished the children to dread nothing but offending God or disobeying His representatives in authority over them. He never sought to minimise the sterner side of their mission when teaching his Daughters how to set about their task. "A real love of children is the best guarantee of success in teaching" he tells them, "but it must be a disinterested love, asking nothing for self, for their souls belong to God and it is to Him that they must be taught to lift up their hearts in gratitude. Tact and patience are required as well as unselfishness. A great deal of

forbearance is needed in correcting faults or encouraging efforts. . . . And nothing must be exacted from a child beyond what it can really produce. . . . No matter what branch you may be teaching, you can do your pupils an immense amount of good, for you stand for the idea of religious self-sacrifice, and that is an impression which they will never lose. . . ."

He recalls one of his own experiences as follows: "I once knew an obscure priest¹ who, when quite young and burning with zeal, aspired to works of the apostolate, but, sad to relate, his Bishop made him master of a Junior Form at the *Petit Séminaire*, and he was obliged to teach the rudiments of Greek and Latin, and, worse still geology from morning till night. 'Alas, dear Lord!' he cried, 'was it for this I went through my theological studies? I dedicated myself to Thee that I might save souls and now I am put in charge of fossils!' But it so happened that some of the pupils of this poor priest became excellent Catholics and others priests and monks. One day he received a visit from a very shabby-looking ecclesiastic who said to him:

"'Do you recognise me, Father?'

"'No, who are you?' he replied.

"'I was your pupil for two years, and my name is Kobès.'

"'And what are you doing now? Where is your parish?'

"'I am the Bishop of New Guinea,' answered the

¹ The reference is to himself.

priest, and, opening his cloak he displayed his Pectoral Cross. The master of the Junior Form as he knelt for the Bishop's blessing remembered with joy the once-hated geology, so true is it that our most mortifying occupations are those which God usually blesses and prospers."

But Father Théodore knew that all his best energies should be devoted to the Novitiate. The Congregation he had to form called for many prayers and much hard work if its objects were to be attained by the means at his command. It was the wish of the Founder that the harmonious blending of the active with the contemplative life should be realised in each of the "Daughters of Sion." His ideal he found in the two Sisters of Bethany, Martha and Mary Magdalene, in whom the Evangelist shows us models of apostolic zeal, of contemplation, of self-sacrifice and of the joy which comes from union with God. This twofold life was to be specially devoted to reparation and intercession for the unhappy Jewish race, a cause which has, perhaps, been more misunderstood and more neglected than any other.

Israel is another Lazarus who will only be recalled from death to life by the tears of Incarnate Love and a charity which knows no limit.

"Our Lord's words will never fail," Father Théodore used to say, "and those addressed to the Daughters of Sion on the 'Way of Sorrows' when He charged them to weep and pray for Israel will have their fulfilment also. Mary's companions heard these

words as they came from the Heart of Jesus, and those who have inherited their Vocation, the Religious of Sion, re-echo these supplications and ask that they may be restored to the fold for whom Jesus Christ especially prayed upon the Cross. If a remnant of Israel has been miraculously preserved throughout the ages it is because God intends to bestow upon it a last and crowning grace. The time will come when this remnant will be restored to favour and give fresh glory to the Church. Such is the teaching of the Apostles and the Fathers." "Are you then to remain idle," Father Théodore used to say to his Daughters, "until the veil is removed that hides from the Jews the Light? God forbid—Our Lord gave a special charge to the Apostles to preach the Gospel to the Jews: 'Ite potius ad oves quae perierunt domus Israel,' but this apostolate did not exclude other nations. The first and principal interest of Sion is doubtless the conversion of Israel but other works may be embraced and other missions of charity may be undertaken if they do not interfere with this special work. Add labour to unceasing supplication, and your sacrifices, no less than your prayers, will draw down from on High the graces that have been promised. This is why your Constitutions authorise you to open schools for the upper classes as well as for poor children and to take under your care work-rooms and orphanages. Your Constitutions have also provided for a House of Contemplation where souls called to devote themselves in a special manner

to the salvation of Israel may lead a life entirely devoted to penance and to prayer. In this House Silence will be more strictly observed, Enclosure will be more absolute, and the Roman Breviary will be recited daily."

As Father Théodore said, it is easy to understand the charity which succours little children, poor people, and invalids, and the zeal of missionaries for the conversion of idolaters, but devotion to the cause of the Jews is something intimately bound up with the love of God; it is the fruit of a special revelation from Him to chosen souls, a bond of closest union with Him. In the eyes of the world such a vocation, when not an enigma, is a scandal. But this should only tend to deepen the fervour, the fidelity, and the love of those souls who have reposed on the breast of their Master and have hearkened to the pleading of His Heart for His "brethren." So we are not surprised that Father Théodore chose for the foundation-stone of his Congregation the virtue of charity, which St. Paul calls "the most excellent of all." The Constitutions are full of this spirit as well as Father Ratisbonne's own discourses. "I wish to see the virtue of charity practised to an heroic degree in our religious family," he said with great earnestness. "I wish you to conquer your repugnances, to overcome yourselves; I wish you to love and bear with one another. The more you love each other the more you will love our Lord Himself. . . . As God is my witness, I would rather see every trace of this infant Congregation swept away at

once than feel it did not possess the holy virtue of charity." He intended it to be a family whose members live in love and obedience, in true and simple humility. Each of his Daughters was left free to follow her own inclination if she felt drawn to penance and mortification, but he specially enjoined on them all a spirit of cheerfulness in God's service, and "to run with joy in the way of His commandments."

For thirty years Mother Alphonsine Würmser (the living proof of God's Will that the *Neophytat* should be founded) held the post of Mistress of Novices. Her heart was filled with the twofold love, of God and of her Congregation, and she worked for the One and for the other with her whole strength, her whole heart and her whole mind. She could be depended upon to carry out faithfully all the Founder's directions, was a vigilant and reliable auxiliary and a most valuable factor in the development of the Order. Mother Stouhlen was full of maternal tenderness for the Novices, and her exhortations reflected her own loving devotion to the Sacred Heart. Quite unconsciously she illustrated by her example the Instructions she gave to them on the virtues of charity, humility and abnegation. The statue of Our Lady, before which Father Théodore had prayed for a sign that the foundation was pleasing to God, now stood in the Novitiate, in full view of the Aspirants, to remind them of the origin of their own vocations. A like motive made Father Théodore choose St. John the Baptist

as the special Patron of the Novices, and he explains : "St. John was sanctified before his birth by the sight of Mary, and it was the sight of Mary which first inspired the idea, and the aim, of our work. It was St. John's mission to reconcile 'the children with their fathers.' Such is your vocation also. . . . You are deputed to bring back to the Church the descendants of the Patriarchs. . . . You will sow the seed of this work in every part of the world, for the remnant of Israel is scattered everywhere, and everywhere, and in all places, you must be ready to receive and instruct them and smooth their pathway back to the Fold."

"The most important thing of all," writes the Founder in 1854 to Mother Louise, "is that the Religious should be trained in abnegation and self-sacrifice. . . . I think before long we shall have to think seriously of sending a colony out to the Holy Land." The hopes of many at this time were turned towards the East. Mgr. Jules Level, Superior of *St. Louis des Français*, who was about to start on a pilgrimage to Palestine, invited Father Théodore to join him. But he found it impossible to leave his large community for two months, however, "if you agree," he writes to the prelate, "my brother will go instead. Ever since his conversion my dear brother has felt strongly drawn towards Jerusalem; he feels sure that God is calling him there to pave the way for the work of Sion." The answer came and was all that Father Marie could wish and the departure was fixed for August 27th, 1855.



ARCH OF THE 'ECCE HOMO' AND (ON THE RIGHT)
CONVENT OF 'NOTRE DAME DE SION,' JERUSALEM.

To face page 168.

CHAPTER X

JERUSALEM AND CONSTANTINOPLE (1856—1858)

THE lode-star of Father Marie Ratisbonne's life seems to have been *Notre Dame de Sion* and Jerusalem. When he arrived in the Holy City he had already quite decided to establish a House of the Order there, as he considered the vocation of the Daughters of Sion entitled them to live under the very shadow of Mount Calvary.

Mgr. Valerga, the Latin Patriarch, who had visited the *Neophytat* in 1850, gave full permission for a foundation in his diocese and even invited Father Marie to stay in his house. This kind hospitality greatly facilitated matters for the future Missionary of Israel. His idea was to find a temporary home for a few Nuns and then, if possible, obtain possession of one of the sacred ruins on the *Via Dolorosa*, where later on a permanent building could be erected. But funds were lacking, he could find nothing suitable, and Father Théodore was beginning to persuade him to return to France, when help came unexpectedly and Father Marie was able to secure a two years' lease of a small house, the least unsuitable of any he had seen.

"Our Mission has been so unmistakably sealed with

the approval of God," wrote Father Marie to his brother, "that it is our bounden duty to have confidence. Send me out the first workers; all is ready for them."

His pressing appeal caused great rejoicings in Paris when it arrived on April 4th, 1856, and four Nuns were singled out to start on the 20th of the same month. When the hour of departure came, all assembled in the Chapel for a last farewell. Joy and thanksgiving overpowered the natural feelings of sorrow at parting, and the little colony started on their journey with the sound of the *Magnificat* in their ears. Father Théodore took the lead, for he had made a point of accompanying them at least for the first part of their journey. "It is not given to me," he wrote on arriving at Marseilles, "to enter the Holy Land whither I am leading my children, but like Moses I stand on the opposite shore and lift up my hands to Heaven in blessing."

As he was not going with them all the way he had given them words of counsel and encouragement for the different stages of their journey.

"Soon," he wrote, "you will behold the Holy Land the desire of so many pilgrims before you! You will walk in the footsteps of the Patriarchs, the Prophets and the Apostles! You will be in the native land of Jesus and Mary, and may this prospect support and comfort you! Say to Our Lord that you have come to the foot of Calvary that you may unite yourselves in spirit with the Daughters of Sion of olden time,

to imitate their generosity and to pray for the conversion of Israel! . . . Place yourselves under the protection of St. Joseph, for to him it was said: *Arise, and take the Child and His Mother.* . . . The entry of the Daughters of Sion into Jerusalem is a great event in the annals of our Congregation, the dawn of a new day, the fulfilment of our most ardent desires."

Father Marie was awaiting the travellers at Jaffa.

"Can it really be true or is it a dream?" he wrote. "I cannot believe it. . . . I feel bewildered. . . . How good, how powerful Our Lady is! . . . *Memorare, Piissima Mater!*"

Canticles and psalms relieved the tedium of the road to Jaffa, and when the Nuns came in sight of the Holy City on the evening of Tuesday, May 6th, they dismounted and prostrated themselves in the dust.

On this same date twenty years later (1884) Father Marie died.

The temporary home which the Community was destined to occupy for the next six years was a somewhat gloomy-looking house near the Bazaars on the quay of Damascus. It consisted of six rooms looking on to a very small garden planted with saffron-bushes and a few cypress-trees. The walls were bare, the rooms empty, and even after the necessary repairs it did not fulfil the requirements of even the strictest poverty. "I like to hear of God's work in such beginnings," wrote Father Théodore, "for you must not forget that in the land which once flowed with milk and honey Our Saviour had not where to lay His head."

In those days a chair was a very rare article of luxury in Jerusalem. When the Patriarch came to visit the Sisters, they were obliged to apologise for having no seat to offer him. "But I am a missionary," answered the good prelate, "and I can sit on a packing-case!"

But soon afterwards he went over his own few possessions and sent them the only four chairs which his establishment possessed. There is a blessing on foundations which start in poverty and their early days may be called their age of heroism. Poverty is a presage of future prosperity, and prepares souls to receive the blessings promised to it. The Nuns experienced this when the *Pater dimitte* . . . ("Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" . . .) was sung at the first Mass offered by Father Marie in their Oratory. This cry for mercy was indeed the whole reason and meaning of their presence in the Holy City, and they found all their happiness in this thought. They were there to fulfil a task of expiation and regeneration: expiation by prayer and sacrifice, regeneration by the free education of the children of Palestine who were already in danger of being won over to schism and heresy. It was necessarily a work of charity, as there were no fixed resources nor likelihood of support from such an impoverished population; the work was therefore dependent upon the donations it received. Such a perspective called for the greatest confidence and trust in Providence, for, humanly speaking, the undertaking

was most hazardous; but it was the Will of God that the work should be done, and this was made manifest by the Community never being left without assistance.

The "History of Notre Dame de Sion in the Holy Land" has proved this down to the smallest details. It tells how Father Marie was led to the place chosen by the Divine Will for the work of expiation. Ever since he had arrived in Jerusalem, he had been attracted to the *Via Dolorosa*, that "Way" trodden by Our Saviour from the Prætorium to the Hill of Golgotha. "I shall never forget," he said, "what I felt at the sight of the ruins of the audience-chamber of Pontius Pilate where Jesus Christ was condemned to death. Nowhere had I been so deeply moved except on Calvary and at the Holy Sepulchre."

As soon as he discovered that it would be possible for this precious memento of the Passion to pass into Christian hands he had no further doubt. "The work of expiation," he said to himself, "must be accomplished *there*, on the very spot where Pontius Pilate, showing the Jews the *Man* whose death they demanded, solemnly and prophetically said to them: *Behold your King!* It was *there* that the indictment of the Divine Victim was fastened to the Cross where it has always remained: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. It is *there*, on the *Via Dolorosa*, that Jesus Christ will once more meet the Daughters of Sion and say to them, *Weep for yourselves and for your children*, and it is *there* that an expiatory Sanctuary must be raised, where once more the blood of Jesus Christ shall flow,

and be shed not for condemnation, but for salvation and for the remission of sin."

Then and there Father Marie vowed to God that he would not rest until he had realised this inspiration from on high. And when he rose from his knees, although possessing nothing, he felt ready to meet and overcome every obstacle. Obstacles multiplied, the price was raised from 17,000 francs (£680) to 30,000 francs (£1,200), and finally to 70,000 francs (£2,800)! Father Marie, who had been trying to collect the requisite amount in every direction realised then, as he did many times after, what varying fortune attends a man who has constituted himself the champion of a holy cause and has to beg for it. But on November 24th, 1857, the ruins of the Prætorium became the property of the Congrégation. Soon after they discovered, hidden under a heap of ruins and thus preserved intact, a small side-arch which had formed part of the triumphal arch or state entrance to the *Fortress of Antonia and the Palace of Pontius Pilate*.¹

Father Marie began by erecting a temporary wall round the sacred precincts. "It was the eve of January 20th, 1858," he tells us, "and the Sisters asked me to say Mass that day for the first time in the Oratory which they had arranged under the recently excavated arch. At four o'clock in the morning, eight

¹ This sacred spot, to which the Church attaches a Plenary Indulgence, marks the starting-point of the *Via Dolorosa*, or Way of the Cross. See the "Livre Liturgique des Franciscains," p. 55. Jerusalem, edition 1865.

Religious of *Notre Dame de Sion* came noiselessly out from their makeshift convent each one carrying under her cloak some liturgical article essential for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. I preceded them with a lantern, which was quite necessary, as it was still dark and the roads we had to cross were very rough. We did not meet a living soul, and arrived without hindrance. We closed the gate carefully behind us and immediately the Sisters arranged everything in readiness for the Sacred Mysteries. It was like a scene in the Early Church and we felt as if we had gone back to the days of the Catacombs in Rome. After the Consecration the *Pater Dimitte illis* was chanted almost under our breath, *propter mætum Judæorum*, and at the Communion the Nuns were suddenly moved to renew their vows, which they pronounced with a fervour which is quite indescribable. . . . When we re-entered *Notre Dame de Sion* after our thanksgiving we were still so spellbound by the heavenly consolations so abundantly received at Mass that it seemed strange to find ourselves again among the things of this world."

In this same year (1858) Father Marie was granted a great privilege. He was chosen by the Patriarch to preach the Passion on Good Friday at Calvary itself. "As I was following the solemn procession in the midst of a huge hurrying throng," he writes, "I suddenly felt a little hand slip into mine, it belonged to a young Jew whose two sisters were being brought up by the Sisters of Sion. Alarmed at finding himself

alone in the midst of such a crowd Abraham Mourad thought he would put himself under my protection. I was so touched by his coming to me at such a time and in such a place that I continued to hold the dear boy's hand until we reached Calvary, where I was obliged to leave him to go and take my place near the Altar of the Crucifixion. Since the ever-accursed day when the Jews, my ancestors, shouted their blasphemous imprecations on Calvary no child of Israel had ever raised his voice there. What could I say as I stood trembling, my heart full of unshed tears? What could I say but *Father, forgive them. . . .* My sermon was not long and I soon went back to my little Abraham. . . . I have been asked several times to preach on this anniversary but I have always declined the honour, as it was too much for me. Once in the life of a poor priest seemed to me enough."

Soon after Easter Father Marie left Jerusalem once more and returned to Paris. The acquisition of the ruins of the Prætorium was an immense gain to the foundation in the Holy Land and an important event for the whole Congregation. But although wonders had been accomplished it may be said that everything still remained to be done. During the year 1856, which was that of the arrival of the Sisters in Jerusalem, several offers of foundations were made, one for Algiers, one for Madrid, and a third for Constantinople. It was not possible to accept all at the same time, but Constantinople, as capital of the Turkish Empire, and supreme in the government of Jerusalem, was a most

important and desirable centre. Father Théodore realised this and he saw in the suggestion fresh possibilities of working for the salvation of the Jews. "There are villages round Constantinople," he wrote, "entirely populated by Jews, and we are assured that they are more amenable than in France." At this time the Lazarists and the Sisters of Charity had Father Étienne for Superior-General, and he, wishing that the work of St. Vincent de Paul should remain within the limits laid down by the Founder, was thinking of handing over to a teaching Order the girls' schools in the East hitherto directed by the Sisters of Charity. Memories connected with the Miraculous Medal and the Chapel at *La Providence* naturally turned his mind to the Congregation of Sion to whose Founder he was much attached. Negotiations were started and successfully carried through, and on September 8th, 1856, the Status Domus,¹ which is read at the close of the Annual Retreat, announced that Mother Louise and twelve Sisters were destined for the Mission of Constantinople. Their cheerful alacrity and courage made such an impression on the parish priest of Evry who was present that he offered himself on the spot to Father Théodore as Chaplain to the new foundation. This suggestion, coming from a priest of such piety and intelligence, was too good to be refused, and Father Renard eventually gave fifty years of devoted work to the Community of *Notre Dame de Sion*. God had sent

¹ The list of the Staff, or enumeration of the persons allocated to each house of the Order.

the Nuns a faithful friend whom they appreciated as he deserved.¹

Father Théodore thanked God for the courage of his spiritual Daughters and prepared to take them as he had done the others as far as Marseilles. Soon after he wrote the following account of their departure on September 29th: "I said Mass the same morning and gave Holy Communion to our Missionary Nuns with the emotion of a father. In the afternoon we went down to the harbour where the ship was awaiting us, a splendid majestic-looking vessel bearing the words "Le Sinai" in shining, golden letters. Her cables were like great strong roots keeping her motionless on the water, but every now and then clouds of steam rose in eddying spirals into the sky. . . . I blessed their cabins and remained on the bridge till the last moment. . . . At last the signal was given, the hour of parting had come and no amount of resignation could quite keep down our sorrow; the Sisters surrounded me, and having blessed them I hurried from the ship. . . . I remained standing on the quay just where I had stood when the Nuns started for Jerusalem. I watched the mighty vessel gradually vibrate from stem to stern and advance slowly as if she, too, were bidding farewell to the shores of France. But soon she began to cut her way swiftly through the sea and disappeared at last behind the distant horizon. . . . May every blessing go with her. . . ." "It is a great sacrifice,"

¹ Father Renard died at *St. Jean in Montana* on July 12th, 1911, at the age of ninety.

he wrote later to Mother Louise, "but greater still is the heavenly love which has helped us to make it. Let us forget our trials and only remember God's work which has to be done, and God's glory, and God's Providence."¹

The first few days of the crossing were exceptionally fine. But during the night of October 3rd there was a terrible collision and the shock was so violent that the other ship sank in a moment without any possibility of rescue. "Le Sinai" was very much injured, and the scene on board was past description. A few blasphemers among the passengers declared the Nuns had brought ill-luck, but most of the travellers came weeping to ask for their prayers. The Superior kept quite calm and recited the Litany of Loretto and the Rosary. This night of anguish was the Eve of Rosary Sunday. The ship was in imminent danger for five mortal hours, but by the grace of God all peril was finally averted, and "Le Sinai" reached Constantinople without further catastrophe.

There a disappointment awaited the Sisters; the Archbishop proposed employing them for other work instead of in the schools which the St. Vincent de Paul Nuns had managed so successfully. He would have liked to limit them to the opening of a *Neophytat* which would practically have reduced them to inaction. Father Théodore, having been notified of this at once started for Rome. "Trials are hard to endure when they first come upon us," he

¹ Letter of October 4th, 1856.

wrote, "but they are sure to bear much fruit. . . . Crosses must come before blessings."¹ Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda, received the Founder very cordially. As for Father Étienne, he declared that he would rather give up the school altogether than allow it to pass into any other hands. So that Father Ratisbonne was able to write to his Nuns on November 21st as follows: "Yesterday I received the welcome telegram which puts an end to the first of your tribulations. I say your 'first,' because no doubt you will have many others; such is the lot of those who work for God, but He who has so amply protected you up to now will give you day by day the help you need, and my confidence is stronger than ever." The Archbishop had allowed himself to be convinced, and the Nuns of Sion full of gratitude to the Sisters of Charity who had so cordially received them into their house at Galata left them and settled in the school situated in the Pancaldi quarter near the Catholic Church of the Holy Ghost.

It now remained to win the hearts of the pupils who had been, as is but natural, much attached to their former mistresses. Gradually the girls grew accustomed to their new teachers and many blessings attended the Missionary Nuns. The latter soon realised the wisdom of having taken root first of all amongst the Christian population; so great was the feeling against the Jews that when they first arrived it would not have been safe to chant the *Pater Dimitte illis*,

¹ Letter of October 18th, 1855.

even in their own little private Chapel, though this privation did not last long.

"If our hopes are not realised in our lifetime," said Father Théodore, "we will hand them down with the spirit of Sion to our humble Congregation. 'Some plant and others water, but God giveth the increase;' and all shall have the same reward."

About this time Father Marie began to persuade his brother to visit the houses in the East, and Father Théodore seemed likely to do so. "I feel in my heart," he wrote to his Daughters, "that I shall not hold out much longer against my great wish of going to Constantinople." But he was bound to wait until Father Marie who was obliged to return to Europe could take his place at the Mother-House.

On the morning of August 8th, 1858, he took a kind and fatherly farewell of his Daughters, and started, full of confidence in God. The first news of him came from the Straits of Messina and his letter shows what was his chief anxiety as the ship touched at different ports. "Shall we be able to land and go to Holy Communion?" he writes. "This is the great longing of the heart of man, the cure for all possible ills, and our comfort on land and sea."¹ On the Eve of the Assumption the vessel entered the harbour of Constantinople, and the good Father at once proceeded to the Archbishop's Palace to pay his respects to Mgr. Mussabini. "After this visit it was time to go and see our Sisters," he continues. "I found them in their beautiful Chapel, and

¹ Letter of August 10th, 1850.

as I entered to the sound of the *Angelus*, the *Magnificat*, and the strains of the organ, my heart beat loudly and I could not speak. I was deeply moved at the sight of this large family of Sion assembled in a foreign land. Each face recalled a memory, each of these souls had made great sacrifices, and all had given Our Lord heroic proofs of obedience and love. And as I can never behold unmoved any gathering of missionaries my feelings in this Chapel may be imagined!"¹ "I feel every sympathy with the children of Israel," he said a few days later, "but I must confess they are more like poor Agar, their mother, than their father Abraham."² It will be no easy task to wrest them from Mahomet and lead them to Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, with God all things are possible; we must pray for Ishmael and Israel, but the degradation of the two races is a sad spectacle!" Father Théodore then gave a Retreat to the Community followed by one for the pupils. "These eager Orientals were all eyes and ears during the instructions," says a contemporary. "None of them will ever forget the graces they received through the ministry of the priest who, like his Master, 'went about doing good.'"

He himself says: "We have Greeks, Wallachians, Moldavians, girls from Samosata, Smyrna, and Chios, and in addition to these natives of Constantinople, Italians, English, and Germans! But they are all one fold, and live in charity and obedience. . . . I am

¹ Letter of August 16th to the Mother-House.

² Letter of August 24th.

about to leave them for a long absence, and they would be surprised if they could see into my heart and know what a grief this is to me!" On October 1st he took ship for Palestine with his fellow-pilgrim, Father Renard, and after leaving Smyrna they made a pleasant journey to Beyrouth, where they spent three days. "The road to the Holy Land seems very long to me," he wrote, "and I am no longer surprised at the impatience of those who took forty years to get there." They reached Jaffa at last on October 15th. "After an absence of eighteen centuries," cries Father Théodore, "I am once more in my native land! Alas! what changes and upheavals! . . . Next morning at 4 a.m. I went to the Altar to say my first Mass in the Holy Land. . . . What I felt cannot be put into words. . . . I brought all Sion with me—fathers, sisters, children, friends, all those I love, all those I bless! . . . I implored the Author of all good to teach me what to feel on entering the City of God, for I go there not to condemn but to be edified. I do not expect to be edified by men, for everywhere human nature is the same, but I want to drink in holy thoughts from the place itself, with all its memories and hopes. I am resolved to see only what is good in my fellow-men, I wish to think of them as redeemed souls. If I am wrong God will rectify my judgment in the Valley of Josaphat; meanwhile I mean to love them as they are even if as terrible as the sons of Gog and Magog."¹

At six in the morning the heat of the sun being

¹ Letter of October 17th, 1858.

already great the caravan started on horseback and by five o'clock in the afternoon the sombre-looking domes of Jerusalem came in sight. "I should have liked to stop and prostrate myself before *God's footstool*, but my horse hurried me along to the entrance of the Holy City. . . . I had been ahead of my companions ever since leaving the gates of Jaffa. Numbers of Jews were there their faces turned towards Bethlehem. I asked for an explanation, and was told that it was their custom to assemble every evening along the road to await the Messiah, who, according to prophecy, was to come out of Bethlehem. Poor blinded creatures! When will they turn towards Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre? What a mystery is this obstinate faith in a fossilised religion!"¹ The two pilgrims stayed at the Patriarch's house and next day Father Théodore came to say Mass in the Oratory where the Nuns of Sion were assembled surrounded by their little Arab and Jewish pupils. He was much touched at meeting them again, and he says himself, speaking of this occasion: "Some feelings are too deep for the human heart to contain, or language to express." His soul was so profoundly moved by all he saw and by his varied emotions that he was quite unable for a day or two to visit any of the other sanctuaries. "The whole town," he writes, "is one silent burial-ground, a vast aggregation of graves grouped round the one Tomb from which arose the Resurrection and the Life. That is what strikes one first of all, and

¹ Letter of October 17th, 1858.

the first words which come to the mind are these : *That Jerusalem which is above is free . . . the heavenly Jerusalem* (St. Paul, Galatians)."

When he was able to find his way alone about the City of God it was to the Holy Sepulchre that he went most frequently. "The mere sight of it sends a thrill through the heart," he says. "To see the crowds trampling the earth round Golgotha, and all the devout souls hurrying to prostrate themselves on the Tomb and kiss the trace of Christ's footsteps with so much love you would think His Blood still flowed, and that the execrations and strange portents of the Gospel story had never ceased." It was with feelings of awe that Father Théodore beheld that spot which recalls the predictions of the prophet Joel : *In those days . . . I will gather together all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Josaphat . . . and I will plead with them there for My people* (Joel iii. 2).

This valley of desolation where nothing moves or breathes begins at the Garden of the Agony and ends at the Dead Sea. "I ventured on going there alone," says Father Théodore, "but after walking for an hour among the ruined tombs my feet began to fail me. I took pity on myself and returned slowly to the land of the living. While casting my eyes on either side and trying to locate beforehand the place where I shall one day stand, a soothing thought came into my mind which reassured me and filled me with hope. I remembered that at the entry into the

Valley of Josaphat and close to the Grotto of Gethsemane is the Tomb of the Blessed Virgin. And I said to myself: 'On the Day of Judgment that tomb will be a throne of grace; and the children of Mary, and all those who have put their trust in Her, will not perish . . . they will have a loving and powerful Advocate who will protect and shield them. . . .' So I chose my place and that of my Sion family near the Tomb of Mary, and went back comforted."¹

"At the foot of what used to be the Temple," he says elsewhere, "may be seen another of these outworn ceremonies: every Friday the Jews assemble there to weep and pray. I went to see this expecting something ridiculous, but I must confess I was touched by the unshaken faith and the patient, humble devotion of these miserable blinded men and women who were there, some sitting on the ground and others leaning against the walls, wailing to Heaven! They kissed the walls and leaned against them thrusting their hands into the crevices and stamping their feet like unruly children who have been turned out of doors by an angry father and are trying to force their way in again. Poor Jews! The fact that they are living in Jerusalem, that land of miracles, and still persisting in their stiff-necked unbelief, is one of the most amazing things in history. . . . May the Blood of Jesus Christ be upon the heads of the children of Israel—no longer in malediction, but in blessing!" Father Théodore's feelings at the sight of the ruins of the

¹ Letter of November 8th, 1858, to the Mother-House.

Prætorium, now in the possession of his own Sion Nuns, may be imagined. And we can well understand how fervently he prayed when offering up the Holy Sacrifice of the Divine Victim on the morning of October 24th. But the ruins were not yet habitable, and it was in the Nuns' small Oratory that he baptised a young Jew in the presence of the French and Spanish Consuls, of several priests from the Patriarch's house, some Franciscans and the Nuns of St. Joseph of the Apparition, the only Communities established at that time in the Holy City. He made himself helpful and useful to everyone even going out of his way to avoid offending those who differed from him; but he would not allow anything to encroach upon the time he was reserving for a Retreat on Calvary. "Happy the soul," he writes, "who keeps its solitary watch beneath the sombre, majestic arches of the Holy Sepulchre! At first I hardly dared breathe or look round. I let myself be absorbed into the silence while the scenes of the Gospel tragedy passed before my eyes. . . . I hardly knew where I was, if still in this world or resuscitated from the grave after some former life on earth." Father Théodore had spent nearly five weeks in the Holy City without leaving it except to go to Bethlehem, and the time of his departure was now approaching. He had faced before the sorrow which in this world is mingled with even the purest joy, and knew that the happiness of seeing his Nuns in Jerusalem, like all earthly joys, must have an end. On December 8th he reached Marseilles, and two days

later was in the Chapel of the Mother-House. He had intended giving a short Instruction to those assembled for Mass but he could only say these few words : "My dear children, I have not offered up the Holy Sacrifice for ten days and at this moment I can think of nothing but the consolation of going to the Altar where the life of every priest is centred. Later on I will tell you what I feel at being amongst you once more."

"The impression made upon me by the desolate City of God," he wrote soon after, "is one I can never forget. I love Jerusalem just as it is, with its graves, its Calvary, its sacred ruins ; and if it were God's Will that I should think only of my own consolation, I would ask to be allowed to end my days there. But we must look above and beyond these things. . . . The Apostles also must have longed to remain near the Way of the Cross, the Holy Sepulchre, and the Mount of Olives ; but they had to separate and go their different ways, and spread the Gospel on all sides. Like them, we must live out our appointed lives in loving abnegation and obedience."

CHAPTER XI

ENGLAND AND ROUMANIA (1860—1871)

“IN the month of October, 1837,” writes Father Desgenettes, Rector of *Notre Dame des Victoires*, “a venerable priest, the Reverend George Spencer, formerly an Anglican clergyman, came to see me, and asked me to pray for his country. I told him of the Arch-Confraternity and of the graces already obtained and promised him to remember his pious intention. From that time forward, in every village in France which was affiliated to the Arch-Confraternity, the priest and the Congregation prayed once a week for the conversion of England.”

The Abbé Ratisbonne had become a very efficient assistant to Father Desgenettes and was much interested in the Catholic Revival in England, and in the course of his ministry at *Notre Dame des Victoires* he was fortunate enough to get into touch with such illustrious converts as Newman, Faber, and Manning and the relations which he formed with them were never entirely severed.

The first suggestions for a foundation came to him from Ireland in 1852, but at that time the Community of Sion was too small to be divided. Later on

Cardinal Wiseman approached him with another project, and finally, in 1858, after more persuasion, Father Théodore went to England, where he was warmly welcomed.

"I have discovered in London that I am a celebrity," he writes to his Daughters, "and I am fêted and made much of in consequence. To-day I dined at the Crystal Palace, on the occasion of a gathering of the élite of Catholic society to meet Cardinal Wiseman, next to whom I sat. The Cardinal proposed several toasts; first the Pope, then the Queen, then the President of the meeting, and then the Abbé Ratisbonne. I had to make a speech . . . and drank to *England, both Catholic and Protestant*, expressing the hope that Catholics would be further strengthened in charity so that Protestants might approach and learn from us the joys of unity. . . .

"I do not know," he continues, "when I can get away from London. I listen, I reflect, and leave everything in the hands of God. Our affairs require lengthy deliberations and mature decisions, and I do not wish to take any step without guidance from above."

Negotiations were suspended for nearly a year and were then renewed on the occasion of Father Marie's tour through England, Ireland, and Scotland, to collect funds for his orphans in the Holy Land.

By a remarkable coincidence, it was in the Church of *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte* that Cardinal (then Dr.) Manning had preached his first course of sermons to

the English colony in Rome. That circumstance, followed by an exchange of visits in Paris, started the friendship to which the Cardinal referred long afterwards in speaking to the Nuns of *Notre Dame de Sion*. "I knew your two Fathers intimately," he said, "and was much attached to them. In many things we had exactly the same views."

"I am much touched by Mgr. Manning's kindness," wrote Father Théodore in 1860, "and I admit that I should like our beloved Sion to take root in England under the auspices of this man of God. . . . When once our Nuns are settled there and vocations come, they will respond to any appeal in conformity with the spirit of their Institution."

It was the Will of God that this foundation should develop slowly. Certainly it had most valuable moral support but funds were inadequate, and English Catholics could not be depended on for pecuniary help during that period of reconstruction when all they could give was required for their own new churches and newly constituted parishes. A tiny house, as humble as the Cave at Bethlehem, was taken in Westmoreland Place, London, near the Church of St. Mary of the Angels. "I am very anxious that you should begin on March 19th, Feast of St. Joseph," wrote Father Théodore, "even if you have only one pupil."

A few months later, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Mgr. Manning himself deposited the Blessed Sacrament in the Oratory. "To-day," he said

to the Nuns, "salvation has entered this dwelling," and taking for his text the word "Sion," he dwelt upon the promises and hopes attached to their special vocation. In this he was but anticipating the Founder, who wrote shortly after to the Superior as follows :

"You know the wish that lies nearest my heart and which you must endeavour to realise—a *Neophytat* for young Jewesses and Protestants, a delicate and difficult undertaking and one which calls for great prudence and charity, but God's blessing is on the work and the Church holds it dear. You must pray for it, and keep it in mind, and ask people who seem capable of understanding our views to help you. . . ."¹

"Your undertaking is starting as all the great works of God have begun," he says elsewhere. "A Cross and a Chalice are not always made to the same pattern, but their meaning does not change, it is always the same, humiliation and sacrifice. . . . I do not envy Communities who begin prosperously ; evangelical poverty gives me more confidence. The great thing is to have the right spirit in your house and a well-regulated religious life ; your pupils should be pious and well educated, and charity should reign in all hearts ; upon these conditions success is assured."²

A little more than a year after the London Convent had been founded Mgr. Grant drew Father Ratisbonne's attention to Worthing, a small

¹ Letter of February 20th, 1861.

² Letters of March 27th, 1860, and August 27th, 1861.

seaside town in Sussex. Major Gaisford, a recent convert who lived close by at Offington had conceived the idea of building a church in Worthing, where the population was exclusively Protestant, to supply the needs of Catholics visiting the place in summer for sea-bathing. The Bishop thought the church could be made the centre of a Mission to which a Community of Teaching Nuns would be a most valuable auxiliary. Father Marie who had just then arrived in France was asked by his brother to go to Worthing himself and see what he thought of the proposal. On his giving a favourable answer a joint purchase was made of the ground on which Major Gaisford afterwards built a church and presbytery, and the Nuns of Sion erected a convent and school.

"We are choosing St. Teresa as patron of the new Sion," wrote Father Théodore, "and I hope the house will be ready by October 15th, as it can be if all work with heart and soul."

His hope was fulfilled, but he did not hide from himself that this would be a difficult undertaking, and slow to develop.

"The Catholic Church did not emerge from obscurity till three centuries had passed," he wrote on the following Christmas Day. "We must follow Jesus Christ, and not try to outstrip Him. This truth should be always present to us as we watch the providential growth and expansion of the Congregation. For exterior works, as for the life of the soul,

the condition of greatness is humility. Prosperity will come only after inevitable trials."

In 1863 Father Théodore made a hurried visit to Worthing, and on May 4th the Bishop of Southwark laid the first stone of the church with all due solemnity. Catholics and Protestants alike were present, and all preserved a respectful silence during what they could not but feel was a ceremony of deepest significance. One of the Nuns, writing on the subject, applies to England the words spoken of St. Augustine by a holy Bishop: "It is impossible that a nation which is the object of so many ardent prayers should not one day return in its entirety to the paths of salvation."

The English convents were directed by Father Théodore's counsels and encouraged by his support, and in 1867, to their great joy, were visited by the Founder in person. The results of so much courageous perseverance were beginning to be apparent, and it was manifest that any work likely to succeed in England must first strike solid and deep-seated roots. A workroom had been opened in Worthing next to the school, which was but sparsely attended owing to Protestant surroundings. The London Nuns were now living in Colville Terrace where they remained until 1872, under the benevolent patronage of the Oblates of St. Charles. Religious regularity was strictly observed in the humble cenacle and a spirit of prayer and sisterly unity enabled a mere handful of Nuns to carry on at one and the same time work of such

various kinds as the instruction of converts, Jewish Baptisms, meetings of non-resident children of Mary and the direction of three schools to meet the requirements of the different classes of children frequenting them. This was the nucleus of what later developed at Powis Square, and finally expanded into the Convent at Chepstow Villas.

Father Théodore was very pleased to meet again in Rome, in 1870, Mgr. Grant and Mgr. Manning. The former had arrived in very bad health; his answer to those who had tried to dissuade him from the journey was: "It is better to die in obeying the Sovereign Pontiff than to prolong my life by not obeying," and on June 1st he gently faded out of life. A week before his death he had asked to see Father Théodore, and had said "three Hail Marys with him for the work of Sion." Mgr. Manning in his interview with the Founder was equally sympathetic, and shortly after had occasion to give tangible proof of his approval of all the works of the Congregation of Sion by welcoming the Mother-General to England when in 1870 she was driven out of France by the Franco-Prussian War.

"Come one, come all," the Archbishop said, as he blessed the refugees in person. "We can never have too many Nuns in my diocese."

Before very long he put them in charge of the parish schools of Holloway in Father Keens' Mission. This district in the north of London was principally inhabited by tradesmen and the poorer classes.

The reappearance of the Religious Habit in a parish where no Community had been allowed since the days of Henry VIII. caused surprise not unmixed with hostility. But Mgr. Manning's suggestion was warmly supported by the Catholic clergy. "Go to Holloway," they said to the Nuns. "It is a good thing for any Community to be associated with Father Keens' work. He is beloved of God and of men, and there is a blessing on everything he does."

"It is because God looks upon you with special favour," was Father Théodore's comment, "that He has put you on ground bristling with thorns and brambles. Think what a privilege it is for apostolic souls to cultivate such fields."¹

And it is a fact that there have always been a great number of conversions in Holloway. The poverty of the Convent there, however, was nothing to that of Drury Lane, where Father Keens on being made parish priest brought the Nuns to teach in the schools founded by Father Faber. They realised to the utmost the expression "ragged schools"; their scholars were indeed in rags. The classroom, a kind of airless dungeon, was attended by three hundred and fifty of the poorest children even of London where poor children abound. The Nuns, as long as they were in charge—that is to say, until 1892—were obliged to spend two days out of every week at Holloway to keep up their bodily health and refresh their spirits by Community life.

¹ Letter of November 11th, 1872.

Father Théodore much approved of this humble work for his Daughters, and the harvest of souls from among the outcasts of this world rejoiced his priestly heart far more than conversions in more worldly and brilliant surroundings. Mgr. Manning warmly agreed with this view and congratulated the Nuns on having "undertaken the conquest of such an important part of the Devil's kingdom."

Father Dolan when he succeeded Father Keens thirty years later could not thank God enough for all the good he found in this district, where twelve churches had been built, each with its own convent and school. Sion had paved the way for the Communities which had followed. Many were the souls who returned to the True Fold, instructed and prepared by the Nuns. "There is a blessing on you," said Father Dolan, "for I know how much of the progress of the Mission is due to those who have worked so hard from the beginnings."

Roumania was the next country after England to ask for the Daughters of Father Ratisbonne. In 1864 Father Joseph Salandari, Superior of the Friars Minor at Constantinople, had been appointed Visitor-Apostolic of Moldavia. He knew the Nuns of Sion at Pera and asked for some of them to help in the various good works he intended starting at Jassy and Galatz, the two principal towns in his Vicariate.

As a matter of fact all that he proposed doing at that time was to open a Catholic school for a colony mainly consisting of Germans and German-speaking

Poles. But Mgr. Salandari foresaw that the Roumanian aristocracy was likely to profit by a school where their children could get a good French education. "Moldavia is a new country," wrote Father Théodore,¹ "where there are no Religious Communities nor Catholic Nuns, and it is the Will of God that some should go there, under the banner of Sion. I am full of hope; the Jews abound in those parts. . . . The love of Jesus Christ, the good of souls, the extension of the works of the Church, the future of Sion these are the only thoughts which should preoccupy us and make our hearts rejoice: *Delectare in Domino et ipse faciet.*"²

The Missionary Nuns left Constantinople on March 12th, 1866, and were met at Jassy by Mgr. Salandari. It was the first consolation he had known, as he said, since coming to Roumania, and his courage rose at the idea of the good which the little Community would accomplish. The school was opened with twenty-one Catholic children, and in less than a month the number had doubled, and everyone was overjoyed.

"I am full of confidence," declared Father Théodore, "but Confidence should always be accompanied by her two sisters, Prudence and Patience. I do not mean that we should fear or doubt or draw back, I merely say that we should not be in too great a hurry."³

¹ Letter of December 1st to Mother Théodorine Randon.

² "Rejoice in the Lord, and He will do it."

³ Letter of June 2nd, 1866.

These last words referred to the opening of the school which had soon been asked for, and in a short time had become quite flourishing. But the Nuns had a difficult line of conduct to follow in reassuring the parents who mostly belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church. Humanly speaking it was an ungrateful task and likely to have no appreciable results beyond what the Nuns' teaching might evolve out of the brilliant intellect and talent of the Roumanian girls.

But Mgr. Salandari had great faith in example, and believed that in time good influence would work wonders. "Religious souls bear fruit," Father Théodore was wont to say, "only when they put all selfish considerations aside and generously forgo all human consolation. Our Lord will reward them a hundred-fold, but their zeal must be tempered with prudence ! At present you can only fulfil your mission by prayer and example and God will do the rest in His own good time. Controversy would only hinder your work and compromise your future. Therefore avoid attempting conversions, and when in doubt consult the Bishop."

But he was careful not to allow any compromise where principle was involved. "I will have no cutting down of the Catechism," he said in answer to a tentative inquiry. "But you can allow the heretics and schismatics to absent themselves from religious instruction when they do not approve of it. There must be no propaganda, but in matters of doctrine there must be no minimising either. I would not

have a school of Sion branded as schismatic for anything on earth. Charity is indulgent and makes every allowance, but the Catholic Faith is inflexible."

Father Théodore with his great longing for conversions could well understand the sacrifice involved in such a line of conduct, and he goes on to say: "I quite realise all the suffering it costs to check our zeal for souls. It was the 'thirst' of Jesus Christ, but we must learn from Him to let the ears of corn ripen before we gather in the harvest. It is wonderful to think that Our Lord spent thirty years at Nazareth in silence, prayer and work, and still more wonderful to remember how long-suffering He is now that nearly two thousand years have elapsed and the Gospel has not yet borne its full fruit. We can never meditate too often on this. . . . Those who sow do not always reap, but both will have the same reward."¹

Two hundred children came back to the Upper Class School and to the Poor Schools after the holidays in October, 1867. The latter were superintended by Mother Electa Valentin who had returned on purpose from the Holy Land where she had spent ten years of her life between Jerusalem and *St. Jean in Montana*. "Real love of Jesus Christ asks only to follow Him no matter whither," wrote Father Théodore to her. "Your Holy Land must be Roumania now. Your future Holy Land will be Heaven."²

Meanwhile the proposed foundation at Galatz had

¹ Letter of September 2nd, 1867.

² Letter of September 2nd, 1867.

not been lost sight of. Mother Jean Baptiste Lagarmitte, who had also been sent for from the Jerusalem Mission, was put in charge of the new colony.

"We must think of the interests of God," Father Théodore wrote to her, "and not our own spiritual luxuries. The Holy Land to a true Nun, is the land of holy obedience." Otherwise, to use his own expression, it would be "loving the Holy Places better than the Holy of Holies."

The Community was well received. Galatz, a commercial centre, contained many Jews who seemed quite disposed to place their daughters in the proposed Institution. The French, Austrian, and Italian Consuls were most kind and helpful, and Mgr. Salandari gave the foundation a guardian angel in the person of the parish priest of Galatz, Father Pietrobono, a Friar Minor of the Regular Observance. "I would rather have quite a small house at the very church gate," Father Théodore had said, "than a huge school without a Chaplain. This is such an important point that we cannot trust to vague promises. . . ."

From 1867 to 1868 the foundation went through many vicissitudes. A rumour was even circulated to the effect that "the French Nuns had come on a political mission," a report that was not calculated to inspire confidence in them! But neither human obstacles nor shocks of earthquake were able to intimidate them, and after severe trials the work at last seemed fairly started on the path to success.

Their Founder, however, continued to preach prudence and caution. "Go slowly," he said; "do not undertake more than you can manage, and above all, beware lest excess of work and outward occupations affect in any way the religious spirit; keep strictly to your rule, for without these the activities of a Religious House may evaporate into febrile and useless effort. I know this is difficult, especially amidst all the hurry and pressure of a new foundation, but the time you give to prayer, to your Office, and to other devotions, is not wasted; on the contrary, it gives life to each of your daily duties."

He was very anxious about the hardships inevitable in a strange climate and country. "The cold weather," he adds, "makes me often think of you. I should like to know if your house is warm enough, and if you have proper winter clothing. . . . Tell me about the climate of Galatz and the general feeling in the country; I want to hear all about your pupils and any dealings you may have with the outer world. I am sure you have plenty of mortifications. My natural inclination would be to pity you sometimes for your privations and your poverty, but from a higher standpoint I rejoice and congratulate you. Whatever we refuse to Nature is a gain for grace, and not one single sacrifice will fail of its reward."¹

"Courage," he writes again; "march boldly on through all the checks and hindrances which never fail to mark a work of God. There are two weapons

¹ Letter of October 31st, 1868.

which are always victorious, Prayer and Patience. Patience trusts to time, and Prayer to Eternity."¹

In March, 1868, Father Théodore announces his coming visit. "When you see my white hair," he writes, "you will wonder at my courage and energy, but I trust all to God and do not think of the fatigue. What really weighs with me is leaving our dear Home. . . . Still, I think it my duty to carry out my original intention and make the journey, leaving all my solitudes in the Divine Hands."

On his way he revisited Strasbourg after an absence of twenty-four years. "My impressions," he writes, "are more or less the same as those one receives everywhere in this world, made up of joy and sadness, except that here sadness predominates. The generation I knew has disappeared and I feel as if I were in a foreign country. The only thing unchanged is the beautiful Cathedral standing in all its majesty as of old and that is my one consolation."² His only surviving relations were one brother and sister. "This remnant of my family is almost Christian," he says, "but that 'almost' is a heartbreaking barrier."³

He preached in Munich in the Church of the Holy Trinity before a very large congregation. Finally he reached Jassy and soon discovered how much still remained to be done in Roumania. "But I should have to spend months here," he adds, "and I am obliged to leave again in a few days."

¹ Letter of October 30th, 1867.

² Letter of April 11th, 1869.

³ Letter of April 16, 1869.

In addition to the Sisters' Retreat he gave one to the children, and preached several times in the Parish Church, among other occasions on Good Friday, when, by some strange impulse, the parents of the Jewish pupils asked "if they might come and hear him *on that day*."

"I would like to invite them all," he writes, "at the risk of being stoned."

In Roumania, as elsewhere, his charity sought to bridge the differences of thought which divide the hearts of men. At last he left, most thankful for all he had seen. "My poor soul needed rest almost more than my body," he wrote three days later, "for our farewells, though taken quietly and in a simple Christian spirit, had touched me to the heart, and I felt I could bear no more. God alone knows what the feelings of a priest and a father are at times like these. . . . I am now in Galatz where I was much moved by my first meeting with the Sisters, who made a little holiday of my arrival and introduced me to new children of Sion."

He was much interested by the Jews of Galatz. "They are walking mummies," he said, "and converting them would be like raising the dead to life. Yet with God all things are possible, and they *will* be converted. They already send their little girls, beautiful little creatures, to Sion to be educated. Grace is everywhere at work and germinating."¹

From Galatz he proceeded to Constantinople by

¹ Letter of June 3rd, 1869.

the Black Sea. "I united myself beforehand," he writes, "with all the thoughts and intentions of Jonas, and I went into my cabin as if it had been into the interior of the whale. What joy it was to come up out of this abyss on to the shores of the Bosphorus ! . . . I am really surprised that my impressions of the last two months have not been too much for me ! In spite of curbing every feeling and trying to die to self, I feel my heart melting into a rain of tears and I can only call upon God to preserve me from becoming too emotional."

Ten years had elapsed since Father Th  odore's last visit and the Constantinople foundation was in a most flourishing condition ; it now included a boarding-school, a poor school, and a workroom where the girls were boarded free of charge ; besides which, meetings for former pupils (to maintain them in the practice of their religion) were held in the Convent. By request of Mgr. Brunoni, the Apostolic Delegate, a school had been opened in 1863 at Cadi Keu   (Chalcedony of the Ancients), on the coast of Asia. Mother Lucie Mayer, one of the Founder's first neophytes, was in charge of it. "I must tell you about our Sion in Asia," she wrote to him. "You have already heard how exquisitely it is situated. We have before us the majestic spectacle of the sea and the Golden Horn, as well as the most charming landscapes. Whichever way we look we find fresh things to admire in this enchanting country."

But pupils were scarce and hard to get in the

ancient city, and the Nuns were disappointed that matters moved so slowly. But, as the Founder reminded them: "Nothing moves so slowly as patience, and yet Holy Scripture says it is by this virtue that we 'run in the ways of the Lord.' . . . It is a great joy to have founded a House of Mary in an infidel country! But it must be a Religious House in the true sense, and one where the Spirit of God reigns."

The community still very small in 1869 when the Founder visited them, were, at any rate, doing their best to carry out his instructions and to keep up the traditions of the Mother-House, so that having blessed and encouraged them he went on his way. "I am not really separating myself from you, my dear children," he would repeat. "I am but going back to the Sion Home where God wills me to live; I am retiring to the source whence ebbs and flows the vital stream of love and charity which runs in the veins of all my children."

A few days after his return to Paris he writes regretting that he cannot yet make up the arrears of his correspondence. "I would like to write to each one separately," he says, "but that would mean finding two things, the first is time, and the second is my heart. As for my time I am always praying for more, for the days fly by without bringing me the leisure I long for, and my heart, alas! is divided piecemeal between Constantinople, Jassy, and Galatz."¹

¹ Letter of August 19th, 1869, to Mother Rose Valentin.

CHAPTER XII

THE ARCH-CONFARTERNITY OF CHRISTIAN MOTHERS (1850—1867)

FATHER RATISBONNE in his readiness to obey what he believed to be the indications of Providence had, almost in spite of himself, become the Founder of a Religious Community which was gradually extending to all parts of the world. Almost simultaneously with this Congregation there had grown up under his direction a totally different work whose numerous branches still continue to spread. As early as the year 1868 Mgr. Guibert¹ said of this latter undertaking: "It corresponds exactly with the needs of the times, and may become the most efficacious remedy for all the evils that religion has to suffer nowadays."

In 1850 Father Théodore went to Boulogne to preach a Novena; his work there had been more than usually blessed on this occasion, but the preacher did not foresee that this temporary Mission was destined to be the starting-point of a permanent Institution. In the designs of Providence Father Théodore had been sent to Boulogne especially to be brought into

¹ Mgr. Guibert, then Archbishop of Tours, and later Cardinal Archbishop of Paris: Letter of November 30th, 1868.

contact with a soul who had received an inspiration from God which, under his direction, was to be productive of great good. Madame Louise Josson de Bilhem, whose name is so identified with the Arch-Confraternity of Christian Mothers, was born in Paris on July 8th, 1804. Gifted in mind and soul, with a fund of solid piety, she was married at seventeen after a careful education, and her children owed their religious principles and their faithful observance of them to their mother's teaching. Her home was in Lille where her husband was President of the Law Courts, and she herself the moving spirit in all the good works of the town.

She became acquainted with a lady who was in great distress about her son's evil courses, and Madame Josson, full of pity conceived the idea of getting Christian women who wished to safeguard their children's eternal welfare to join in one fervent Association of Prayer. A few pious ladies began to meet daily to say a prayer for this intention to Our Lady Immaculate, and the little Association so formed was placed under the patronage of St. Joseph. It was then that the Novena at Boulogne brought Madame Josson into contact with the Founder of what was then the almost unknown Congregation of *Notre Dame de Sion*.

She believed he would be the right person to consult about her project and that he would truly and willingly tell her what he believed to be the Will of God, while he, on his side, was deeply interested in what

she had already attempted. He assured her that the "little grain of mustard seed would grow and bear much fruit." "Yes," he wrote a month later to Madame Josson, "I feel that our meeting was unmistakably the work of Providence . . . but I wish to leave it to God to show us His Will in this matter that His ways may be justified and His glory promoted. . . ." ¹

He seemed in no hurry to move further in the matter and was not even able to come and preach a charity sermon at Lille as Madame Josson begged him to do. But being on the eve of his journey to Rome he gladly promised to beg the Sovereign Pontiff to send his blessing to the Association of Mothers.

In answer to the petition presented by Father Ratisbonne, Pius IX. issued the following Decree: ² "With all our heart, We grant to the members of the Association a Plenary Indulgence applicable to the souls of the faithful departed, on the Feasts of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, of the Patriarch St. Joseph, and of St. Monica, on the usual conditions."

"The Feast of the Compassion was drawing near," Madame Josson wrote later, "and the Associates, then numbering about forty, wished to meet and have a Mass said, so as to confide their beloved children to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The precious Decree arrived in Lille on April 10th, 1851, the Eve of the

¹ Letter of September 12th, 1850.

² Dated March 15th, 1851.

Feast, and this seemed a good opportunity for the proposed gathering, which was arranged for the next day in the Chapel of Our Lady of Dolours. Mass was said for the first time for the intentions of the work, and after a sermon preached by a Jesuit Father the Decree of Rome was read aloud to those present.”¹

The Association now authorised by the highest ecclesiastical authority of the Diocese soon had a Branch of more than sixty members at Valenciennes and at Cambrai a still larger one.

But hopes chiefly centred in Paris and the opportunity of founding a Branch there came when Monsieur Josson de Bilhem, as Deputy for Northern France was obliged to settle in the capital with his family. On the Feast of St. Monica the “Mothers” forming the nucleus of the new Confraternity assembled by permission of Mgr. Sibour in the Chapel of Notre Dame de Sion, henceforth to be the centre of the work now placed under the direction of Father Ratisbonne with Madame Josson as President, a title which fell to her by common consent and which she retained until her death.

In less than three years there were eleven hundred Associates in the Paris Branch. “At each of our meetings,” announced the President at the inaugural gathering, “our Director has promised to say a few words of encouragement and advice which will apply equally to our own sanctification and to the spiritual welfare of our children. His instructions show how

¹ Report of March 19th, 1855.

deeply interested he is in our Association of Prayer, which he tells us 'is most dear to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.'"

At the November meeting when Mass was said for deceased members and their children, Father Ratisbonne entered into some of the details of organisation. He suggested that the ladies should inform the President or the Director of the Paris Branch of the favours granted in answer to their prayers. "It is important that these facts should become known, in gratitude to God, for the edification of the Associates, to increase and justify their faith, and to obtain new spiritual treasures from the Sovereign Pontiff."

It was not long before the Holy Father showed his unmistakable approval of the work. By a Brief dated March 11th, 1856, the Association, which consisted already of some four hundred Branches in France and other countries, was raised to the status of an Arch-Confraternity, and officially placed under the direction of the Superior of the Order of *Notre Dame de Sion*. This was a great favour for an Association of only five or six years' growth, and the promulgation of the Brief was made as solemn as possible.

Father Théodore in his capacity as Director announced the privilege to two Associates who were living at a distance. "How many hopes centre on this Arch-Confraternity!" he writes in his circular. "We know the force of prayer even when not offered in common. How can the Heart of God be closed to

the tears, the hopes, the supplications, of pious and loving Christian mothers who unite together to invoke the Queen of Grace! The Confraternity has already shown its influence in a wonderful way, but now that it has been authorised by the Holy See it will fight more valiantly than ever against the powers of evil. The Gospel tells us that prayer and charity are irresistible, indeed, they are the only weapons a woman should use. They will give her the victory, and be to her maternal heart a perpetual source of consolation and joy.”¹

Accompanying this circular were the Constitutions drawn up by Father Théodore and approved by the Archbishop. They indicate the aim and pious practices of the Confraternity, the localities where it is established, the conditions of admission and of participation in its advantages, the formalities to be observed by intending Associates, and finally the Feasts to which the Sovereign Pontiff has attached Plenary Indulgences. The simplicity of the Constitutions is most striking; they are not overloaded with devotional exercises and the wise Director evidently means the Christian mother to have a very enlightened idea of what religion requires of her, and to aim at perfection by the ungrudging fulfilment of duty. At the close of the year 1856, so memorable in the annals of the Confraternity, Madame Josson quoted the following words of Father Théodore in her Report: “When I look at our Association, so young

¹ Circular issued May 1st, 1856.

in growth and so modest in its beginnings, and consider the abundant blessings it has received, I cannot be surprised that the Chapel of Sion is no longer large enough to contain all the Associates. It is the voice of the Sovereign Pontiff which has brought this about; it is he who makes all work fruitful which is done for the Church.”¹

Father Ratisbonne preached for the space of twenty years to the grateful and appreciative “Mothers” assembled at the feet of *Notre Dame de Sion*. He presided over their meetings and conducted their Retreats. God seemed to have given him an intuition of their needs, and a special grace for instructing, encouraging, and maintaining them in a truly spiritual atmosphere. But as his counsels could not reach the Associates in the provinces, or in foreign countries, the Director in 1859 wrote a book for them entitled: “A Manual for Christian Mothers.”²

“Father Ratisbonne’s intention in publishing the ‘Manual for Christian Mothers,’” says the Vicomte de Melun, “is to teach them how best to fulfil their God-given mission. In his touching and beautiful instructions he does not attempt to minimise the duties and difficulties of maternity as the Gospel would have it understood, on the contrary, he points out how hard the road is which leads to perfection. One thought pervades every page of the Manual and might fittingly be taken as a motto for the Arch-Confraternity :

¹ Report of December 13th, 1856.

² This volume reached its twenty-first edition in 1914.

'Those mothers who are trying to become better women have their reward even in this life, for God listens more favourably to their prayers for their children.'"¹

Father Ratisbonne anxious to maintain at the same level of fervour the Confraternities affiliated to the Arch-Confraternity in Paris, gave Retreats to the Branches in the Provinces as far as his many occupations permitted. In the course of his journeyings he had the consolation of erecting new Confraternities in the East, in Roumania, in England and also in Rome, and, in all, he was equally interested. Mgr. Gerbet, Cardinal de Boland, Mgr. Gay and Mgr. Mermillod were often present at the Meetings of "The Christian Mothers," and the successive Archbishops of Paris, Mgr. Sibour, Cardinal Morlot, and Mgr. Darboy also honoured them with their presence. Mgr. de Segur and Mgr. Level were kind enough to preach more than once with an unction which savoured of the spirit of St. Francis of Sales.

The Arch-Confraternity overflowed with vitality and the success of the movement was quite beyond expectation. From that time forward the number of Associates never fell to less than sixty thousand, and now they are reckoned at more than two million, divided between two thousand seven hundred Branches. The spiritual sons of Father Théodore have kept up the tradition of the Founder

¹ Article of May 28th, 1859, in the *Journal de tout le monde*.

ever since, in their care for the work, and their Superior is always *ipso facto* Director-General of the Arch-Confraternity.

Memorials of the countless graces received by this army of supplicants are to be seen in the Chapel where so many prayers were granted. In 1868 Madame Josson wrote: "Several Directors of Provincial Branches and many Associates from different countries have come on pilgrimage to *Notre Dame de Sion* to be present at our meetings, and have read our thanksgivings recorded in golden letters on tablets of marble. How touching it would be if the walls of this Sanctuary of Sion were wellnigh hidden beneath these *ex-votos* of maternal gratitude!"

The Arch-Confraternity has always striven to realise this ideal; year by year fresh stanzas are added to this Epic of prayer and thanksgiving, and each *ex-voto* represents some secret longing of a mother's heart, her tears, her tireless supplications, and her gratitude to God.

Madame Josson very much wished for the publication of a magazine to appear at frequent intervals and link up the Branches with their Centre. In due time the Director conscientiously sketched out the plan of *Les Annales*, with all the care due to this fresh form of apostolate. The idea was quite simple: the magazine was to consist of—(1) the principal sermons preached to the Associates in Paris or elsewhere; (2) some edifying incident; (3) news from the Provinces supplied by local Presidents; (4) obituary

notices of deceased members and reviews of books. One or two of the obituary notices were drawn up by Madame Josson who also contributed some devotional poems in very good taste and showing decided talent.

But the mission of the devout President was not to be confined to the Arch-Confraternity. From the early days of the Congregation of Sion it had always been a matter of regret that there was no way of keeping in touch with the adult Jewish converts or of completing their religious instruction and guiding their first footsteps on the threshold of the Church. In this respect they were worse off than the children brought up in the different Catechumenates.

"No one wishes more than I do," said Father Théodore in 1849, "that it were possible to form a small group of charitable and fervent Catholics willing to take under their protection the converts who are the outcome of the work of *Notre Dame de Sion*. These newly made Christians of Jewish birth sever every family tie and lose every friend they have in order to enter the Church, and their former co-religionists never open their doors to them again. And in addition to these trials they have a still harder ordeal to go through; they discover that when they have lost all worldly goods no one takes an interest in them, not even Catholics. No one pays any further attention to them or takes the trouble to find out whether these souls redeemed and purified by the blood of Jesus Christ are in danger of being lost after

all, for lack of friends, or of good example, or of common charity. . . . It was not so in the Early Church. For some time I have been thinking over the matter and wondering how I could get some Catholic families to take a practical interest in this work of salvation. . . .”

This idea was the origin of the Institution of *The Lady Associates of Notre Dame de Sion*, founded in 1885. They were principally drawn from “the Christian Mothers,” and Madame Josson was made President of their group also. “I am not going to multiply either your religious exercises or your prayers,” said Father Théodore. “For the present you will confine yourselves to saying the *Sub tuum præsidium* daily, and at the Elevation during Mass the *Pater dimitte* in union with the Daughters of Sion. At your weekly Saturday meetings you will say the Office of the Immaculate Conception, after which you will sew for the children and the adult converts while some devotional work is being read aloud. . . .”

In June, 1856, a Nun was deputed to preside over these gatherings.¹ The Founder introduced her to the Lady Associates in these words: “She will be a living link between you and the Community, and a channel by which its spirit will be transmitted to you.”

There were seldom more than twelve of these Associates at one time.

“With twelve disciples Jesus Christ converted the

¹ This was Mother Marie Paul Hibon, who became the fourth Superior-General of the Congregation in 1885.

whole world," the Founder reminded them, "and in a smaller sphere much can be done by twelve really Christian women. . . . But are we true disciples of Jesus Christ?" he proceeded, warming with his subject. "No doubt we frequent the Sacraments, perhaps assiduously; we go through a round of pious exercises and flatter ourselves that we have done great things. But does all this make us what the Gospel says we should be? . . . Do we try to combine worldliness with the Christian spirit? . . . Do we forget this world is a land of exile and try to make it a Paradise? . . . Nowadays abnegation and self-sacrifice are unknown, and a priest who encourages a religious vocation is put down as a foe to family life and as an enemy of Society."

He gave these women who were surrounded by all the luxuries of wealth the most serious advice on the bringing up of their children, dwelling much on the force of example, and suggesting at the beginning of Lent that an austere and Christian rule of life should replace the severe fasts and penances of primitive ages.

The Meetings began by prayer, and in his Instructions he explained to them how their intention in becoming affiliated to the family of Sion was being realised: "Communities," he said to them, "are like great vessels safely anchored in port where no storm or shipwreck can harm them. A crowd of small craft surrounds them offering their services in exchange for the rich cargoes the great ships have brought home. You, ladies, are like these little boats around

the great ship Sion, and in return for your sympathy and your practical help you receive a share of our spiritual treasures. You are associated with the prayers, the labours, and the sacrifices of the hand-maids of Jesus Christ, and, as you truly say, the exchange is to your advantage. Courage, then! Ascend the holy mountain and repeat with those whose dwelling-place it is : *In Sion firmata sum.*"

Nine years had elapsed since the founding of the Ladies' Association when Madame Josson lost her husband. The widow was left with three children, who were already settled in the world. Her natural leaning to the religious life would have carried her then and there into the cloister but for the prudence of Father Théodore who held her back. He felt that this kind of inclination should be carefully weighed with prayer and reflection, and was also quite aware how much good a thoroughly detached person may do by remaining in the world. Madame Josson saw his point of view, and having given the half of her fortune to her children, she settled in a house in the *Rue Vavin*, wall to wall with the Convent of *Notre Dame de Sion*. She was sixty years old when she thus completely changed her mode of living, and left her luxurious house for this humble abode. In her desire to imitate the customs of a Religious House she retained her women servants only and undertook a good deal of work herself, which, considering her delicate health, was worthy of commendation. Her example soon bore fruit and two other widows joined

her, and a time-table and Rule of Life were drawn up for them by Father Théodore. Their days were spent in prayer, study and manual labour, visits to the poor, and the transaction of necessary business. On Saturdays they joined the Lady Associates whose position and home duties still retained them in the world. Owing to their more frequent instructions, the Associates of the *Rue Vavin* were better trained for the new duties they had undertaken, and before long they had an opportunity of beginning their special work. They were put in touch with a Jewish family to whom their friendship was the means of salvation. Two young girls¹ were the first-fruits of the many conversions which afterwards followed. The affectionate welcome and the kindness they received in the *Rue Vavin* were quite a revelation to these two interesting young converts, while their instruction, their victorious struggles, their gradual recognition of the truths of the Catholic Faith, and finally their Baptism, were sources of great joy to Madame Josson, whose motherly interest in them never abated. But as she guided them step by step in the practice of Christian duties her own longing for the Religious Life which had been so strong at the beginning of her widowhood grew more and more intense. In 1866, when barely recovering from a painful illness, she again approached Father Théodore on the subject. Although he could no longer turn a deaf ear to her entreaties, he would not take the sole responsibility of a decision in the case of such

¹ Mesdemoiselles Franck.

an important personality as the President-General of the Arch-Confraternity of Christian Mothers. He insisted on Madame Josson asking the advice of the Archbishop of Paris, and the latter, after mature consideration, gave his complete and unqualified approbation.

"What do you say, ladies, to this resolution?" said Father Théodore to the Lady Associates. "Perhaps you think I instigated it. . . . You are mistaken. I have had nothing to do with it, save to try and oppose it. . . . Religious vocation comes from God and that is why I should never on my own responsibility try to influence anyone. But it is none the less true that a priest who has charge of souls cannot refuse to second the designs of Our Lord when it is His Will to call these souls to a higher degree of perfection. . . . The world will be surprised and critical . . . and I am not surprised that it should be so. For it only proves how far we have wandered from the Ages of Faith, even though as recently as the days of St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul many noble-minded women have been willing to renounce the luxuries and comforts of life in order to serve Jesus Christ in the person of His poor. . . ."

Madame Josson entered the Novitiate of Sion on March 25th, 1867. Her departure naturally made changes in the *Rue Vavin*. But the Saturday meetings perpetuated the spirit of the little family once established there, and until 1884 an unbroken suc-

cession of good, practising, Catholic women testified to the value of her influence.

"As a rule," said Mgr. d'Hulst,¹ "a soul which has been called upon to endow the Church with a new institution will see possibilities far beyond its original field of action; God, by this means, keeps up the ardour of its zeal for what He has given it to do, while others are raised up to carry on its mission and accomplish those things which it hardly dared hope to see."

¹ "Life of Mother Marie Thérèse."

CHAPTER XIII

LIFE IN THE CONGREGATION (1856—1870)

THE Houses of the Congregation, founded since 1856, had considerably added to the cares and duties of all sorts which devolved upon Father Théodore. He was often obliged to concern himself with details as well as with the supervision of the Congregation as a whole, for Mother Stouhlen's health was seriously declining. Her failing eyesight no longer allowed her to take charge of the correspondence, so important a part of government, and with all her heart she longed for someone stronger than herself to continue the task.

Events were moving in this direction. In 1859 Mother Rose Valentin had been appointed Assistant to Mother Louise, the Superior at Constantinople, and had been warned that she would soon be required to succeed her. "Dear Mother Sophie is growing very old," wrote the Founder to Mother Rose; "her grasp is weakening just when the Congregation is growing and beginning to require a firm hand. I myself am more and more absorbed by the duties of the Community of Fathers and other work. In fact, we want a Superior-General capable of visiting the

other houses, and of concentrating the government of the Congregation and of keeping a motherly eye on the whole Religious family. Everyone, myself included, asks for Mother Louise to fill the post.”¹

The Nuns who had assembled at Grandbourg for a Retreat in 1860 were told at the end of the Exercises that *la Bonne Mère*, so beloved of all, was about to resign in favour of the first of her Daughters.

“I was much pleased with the way the Community took the matter,” says Father Théodore. “There were more than a hundred Nuns present at the *Status*, and not one differed from me upon this serious question. It was enough for me to say that such was the Will of God.”²

The humble Religious who was resigning her duties took care to impress upon her successor that God’s Holy Will was indeed manifest.

“MY VERY DEAR DAUGHTER (she wrote),

“Having now reached the age of seventy I have more than once begged our Father to relieve me from the weight of my office, now too heavy for my weak shoulders to support. Our Religious family has, thanks to God, greatly increased, and now requires to be governed by a much younger, more active, and more intelligent Superior than myself. I believe that at my age I do more harm than good, and I am too much attached to our Congregation not to

¹ Letter of September 12th, 1860.

² Letter of September 20th, 1860.

try and endow it with a Superior more likely to contribute to its well-being. Our Father was willing to grant my request, and the Council unanimously chose you to replace me.

"I am quite sure that you will do great things for the Congregation; the experience you have acquired, and the right judgment which has always guided you, have fitted you to fill this post of which the duties become daily more complicated and consequently more difficult to execute. Nevertheless, I offer you my humble assistance as far as I can be of any use to you, for the one thing of which age cannot deprive me is my great love for Sion and all its members. Above all things I shall try to help you by my prayers, they are those of a Mother, and I hope God will grant them. I hope also to be one of your most obedient and devoted Daughters. And now, dearest Mother, with the greatest affection, and the most complete submission,

"I am, Your

"SISTER MARIE SOPHIE OF SION."

Mother Sophie remained by the side of her with whom she had borne the heat and burden of the day as a dearly loved and cherished member of the family now governed by Mother Louise. "I shall always be your *Bonne Mère* in my love for you," Madame Stouhlen had written to the other distant Convents of the Order, "and our Father says that I shall still be your Mother in Heaven. I shall await you there, that

together we may love and contemplate Jesus and Mary.”¹

Father Théodore was becoming more and more anxious for his Institute to be formally approved by the Holy See. It had been officially and legally recognised by the Imperial Government on June 24th, 1856, but the Founder had wisely resolved not to be premature in begging for the sanction of the Sovereign Pontiff. After arranging all the details of the Constitutions with much prayer, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he had wished to see the Rule in practice before committing it to writing. But now that the Order had begun to spread to the East and to England it had become necessary to settle its basis firmly on the unshakable Rock of the Church, and in the beginning of the year 1863 Father Théodore began to work for this end.

“We are now of age,” Father Marie had written, alluding to the twenty-one years which had passed since the Miraculous Apparition, “the Constitutions are about to be completed, Rome will speak, and Sion will develop fresh energies.”

The Founder arrived in the Eternal City on March 25th, and while Pius IX. was having the Rule examined at Propaganda by Father Théodore’s own wish, the latter gladly agreed to Mgr. Level’s suggestion that he should preach the Month of Mary at *St. Louis des Français* in honour of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother and protectress.

¹ Letter of October 21st, 1860.

Father Ratisbonne had received many favours from the Sovereign Pontiff, but he was nevertheless uncertain what degree of approbation he was to expect. The Church gives Religious families three different degrees of sanction and usually at long intervals. First comes the Brief of Encouragement and Praise, then the Decree of Approbation of the Institute and its aims, finally Approval of the Rule or Constitutions. But the good Father was informed that the Brief received in 1847, granting first Indulgences to the Community would be reckoned as the Brief of Praise, and that Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda, authorised him to apply for both the later Decrees at once. This sounded promising but there were many formalities still to be gone through, and for various reasons the Cardinals had been hindered from meeting; Father Théodore began to realise the truth of the text, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." But he had resolved that he would be patient as Rome is patient.

"It seems as if Our Lord were going to send us great graces," he wrote to his Daughters, "for the preliminaries are long and tedious, but all the Cardinals think we shall receive Solemn Approbation."

The clearness and simplicity of the Constitutions had pleased the *Consultor*, Canon Cossa, who was truly a man of God and much respected in Rome for his knowledge, experience and holiness, and the Cardinals were all favourable to the cause. Meanwhile the days, weeks, and months were slipping by.

"When shall I be able to say I am coming home?" wrote the petitioner on July 30th. "I asked Cardinal Barnabo this question, but the good Cardinal answered like everyone else: 'Patience! patience!' That word is the motto of Rome: all the wisdom, strength and diplomacy of the Roman Court are contained in it. I never doubted that Rome was the centre of faith, and I always believed her to be the very source of charity and hope, but now I realise that she is the greatest school of patience in the world. I was a *B.A.* in that virtue, I shall return with a Doctor's degree!"

Nevertheless, he had many consolations. His Holiness Pius IX. had said to him, "Sion is a paradise," even before the long-wished-for sanction was conferred. And when later on Father Théodore was describing that memorable audience of August 18th, 1863, he said: "The Holy Father was so really kind and fatherly that I lost all nervousness at once. I could find no answer to his words, and he repeated them, saying 'Sion must be a Heaven on Earth.'

"'Most Holy Father,' I answered, 'it is charity which works these wonders. . . .' Then I went on to say: 'Holy Father, the works of God move very slowly. I have been waiting for five months to get my business settled, but I do not complain for I have been brought into contact with men of God, the ministers of the Holy See, and I have learned many things.'

"The Pope smiled; he could not understand why five months should seem a long time to me. 'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'how impatient the French are!' 'How-

ever,' I went on to say, 'my business will soon be settled, thanks to the kindness of the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda and Cardinal Panebianco the Postulator of our cause.' And the Pope seemed distinctly pleased at hearing expressions of gratitude rather than complaints.

"‘So Cardinal Panebianco is the Postulator,’ he said, smiling; ‘then I am not surprised that you think it a long business! Our good Panebianco is rather scrupulous; he examines everything very minutely, he wants everything to be perfect, he will not be ready just yet!’

"‘Excuse me, Most Holy Father, he finished some time ago and his Report which has been handed in to Propaganda is quite favourable to the Institute.’ The Pope seemed pleased. . . . ‘I will give you a souvenir for the Sisters of Sion,’ he said, and went into a large room next to his study and made a long search. At last he came upon two very fine cameos with the heads of SS. Peter and Paul in relief. As he handed them to me he said how keenly interested he was in the work under my direction. ‘But,’ he added, ‘I do not think that we have quite reached the appointed time for the conversion of the Jewish nation as a whole.’

"‘Holy Father, if I were permitted to prolong this audience there are so many things I could say to you on that point.’

"‘You can well understand,’ continued the Pope, ‘that it interests me—SS. Peter and Paul were Jews.’

“‘And the Blessed Virgin also, Most Holy Father!’

“Then, unwilling to abuse his great kindness I knelt down to kiss the foot of this great and good Pope. Pius IX. laid both hands solemnly upon my head and gave me a blessing which thrilled me through and through.”

The day of the Congress, August 31st, arrived at last.

After spending some time at *Sant’ Andrea delle Fratte* Father Théodore went straight to the headquarters of Propaganda. “If we get even the Approbation of the Institute I shall have attained my object, and shall be satisfied,” he had said.

Cardinal Barnabo received him at once and read the decision of the Sacred Congregation, which was to the effect that the Institute of Sion was confirmed and approved, as well as the Constitutions or Rule, with permission to present the latter in ten years for any alterations which experience might have suggested in the meantime.

“What a grace! what a blessing! what a three-fold favour!” exclaimed Father Théodore. “We have received all three degrees at once, and we now possess the full and complete approbation of the Holy See.”

A few days later, after the Sovereign Pontiff had signified his assent, Father Théodore telegraphed to Father Marie who was then at the Mother-House, as follows :

Roma locuta; Causa finita. Lætitia magna. (Rome has spoken; the matter is settled. Great rejoicings.)

Sion fundata supra Petram. Magnificat. (Sion is founded on the Rock. My soul doth magnify the Lord.)

And Father Marie at once replied :

Soli Deo gloria! "Memorare. . . ." (To God alone be the glory ! "Remember. . . .")

The decree was signed on September 8th, and since then this day has been set aside in all the Houses of Sion as one of joy and thanksgiving.

When Father Théodore was at last on the eve of leaving the Papal City, he made a note of the various dates of his fortunate expedition as follows :

"Left Paris, Feast of St. Joseph.

"Arrived in Rome, Feast of the Annunciation.

"First Conclave of Cardinals, Feast of the Heart of Mary.

"Decree of Approbation signed, Nativity of Our Lady . . .

"And to-morrow I am leaving under the auspices of the Holy Name of Mary. Mary the beginning, the continuation and the end. Mary always and everywhere, especially in Rome !"

Two days later the First General Chapter of the Congregation, which only consisted of sixteen members, was held at Grandbourg. It began with ratifying the election of Mother Louise as Superior-General, a

post she had already filled for five years. The members then proceeded to form a Central Council, and most of the conferences were devoted to the reading of the "Directory," which is intended to apply general rules to the details of daily life.

"Every point of this spiritual code, however seemingly unimportant," said the Founder to his Daughters, "has been carefully weighed and meditated in prayer, and decided, if I may use the expression, heart to heart with Our Lord. . . . I venture to say God has done great things for you. And now it only remains for you to put the Rule into practice, and to observe it with all your heart and will."¹

This meeting of the first Mothers of Sion to discuss, under the eye of their Founder and Law-giver, the temporal and spiritual welfare of the whole Order, was peculiarly solemn and touching. Before the Conferences closed Father Théodore spoke very forcibly of the spirit in which the Congregation should be governed and of the relations that should exist between the other Houses of the Order and the Mother-House. "Those at a distance," he said, "should bear in mind what they have seen done at the Mother-House; they should appeal to it when in doubt, and look upon it as an always existing centre of unity."

Meanwhile storm-clouds were gathering in every direction. Father Théodore, in alluding to the preparations for the Great Exhibition, wrote on October 25th, 1866: "A crisis is at hand. I cannot help con-

¹ Minutes of the Eighteenth Conference.

trasting the Tower of Babel which I see rising arrogantly in the midst of the *Champ de Mars* with the profound humiliations of the Church. This double and most significant 'exhibition' is being prepared for the year 1867. Will God choose that moment for making His voice heard?" And a little further on he says: "We read in the Emperor's speech that Italy will keep watch over the Papal States; that is reassuring for the Church, but who is to keep watch over Paris?"¹

But he reassures his Daughters. "We must dismiss all apprehensions for the future," he tells them; "we are barely able to meet present eventualities, and we cannot provide for the morrow when we know not what a day may bring forth. The Church goes steadily on her way in the midst of innumerable difficulties of all kinds, and we must do likewise as if our road was quite safe. It would be cowardly to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by fears of possible storms. All we have to do is to love and Our Lord will turn all things to our good. Each alarm, each storm, each trial should rouse us to even greater love, and in that love we shall find motives for confidence and courage, and the graces that have been promised according to our needs."²

As the cataclysm was about to burst cutting off so many lives on the field of battle or in the horrors of civil war, Mother Stouhlen was gently resigning her

¹ Letter of February 15th, 1867, to Father Renard.

² Letter of March 14th, 1847, to Mother Rose Valentin.

soul into the bosom of God. Thirty years had passed since obedient to the Divine call she had left her country and her relations to help with all her heart and strength in starting a work which, humanly speaking, seemed impossible of realisation since its aim was the conversion of the Jews. Steadfast in the face of censure and opposition, patient under the ordeal of poverty, naturally gentle, timid, and unassuming, taking no step except in absolute obedience, she was so truly humble that she seemed chosen as a model for all those who should come after her in the Congregation. After resigning her office as Superior-General to Mother Louise, she wrote: "I shall be upon the mountain-top like Moses, praying for my dear Daughters. But do not forget that the arms of Moses had to be held up otherwise they would have fallen down. So I count on your prayers to help your old Mother to finish her earthly pilgrimage well, that she may deserve the mercy of God when she reaches the gates of the Heavenly Sion."

But Mother Sophie's chief help came from Father Théodore. Writing to her about the gradual failing of her eyesight, he says: "The things of this world are not worth looking at. What really matters is to keep the eyes of the soul open and accustom them to contemplate the eternal realities. . . . Tobias went through a like ordeal, but his patience was great and his reward magnificent! . . . I could never resign myself to becoming blind if I loved Our Lord with my eyes, but we love with our hearts, so you must

carefully preserve yours and let everything else go if necessary. A heart which possesses God can lack nothing, it is its own riches and happiness."¹

In the course of a conference given to the Community during which he touched upon certain wise previsions for the future, Father Théodore said: "Providence has permitted you to have a great example of unselfishness always before you in *La Bonne Mère*. You were witness to the humility with which she resigned her office and returned to the life of a simple religious, and she has never since done anything except under obedience, either in Paris or at Grandbourg. This edified you all, and far from feeling less veneration or affection for her you have all vied with each other in showing her respect and attention. And so it should be with all the Superiors. No Nun need ever feel herself humbled or the object of less consideration because she may have to change her duties, for all positions in the house of God are equally honourable. I could not understand a Nun thinking otherwise."²

Mother Sophie dearly loved all her Daughters, and, though she had resigned other duties, she retained her right to comfort, to encourage and to strengthen them until the end. Never idle, she spent her time either listening to some book of devotion, or in saying her rosary, or in trying to knit under the guiding hand of the Sister who looked after her.

¹ Letters of June 1st and August 3rd, 1863.

² Conference of September 17th, 1862.

She was often to be found kneeling absorbed in prayer at a small window in her room from which she could see the Tabernacle. If one of the Nuns came in at such times, the kind old Mother, "leaving God for God," would turn affectionately to her visitor. It was as if her rare sympathy probed the depths of the human heart and realised the suffering she was asked to console. The soothing words she spoke she had first learned herself from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and it was to that Heart she sent those who came to her for consolation. Strange to say this generous, faithful, sympathetic soul had frequent temptations against hope. But a word from Father Théodore was always enough to quiet and comfort her, and in these feelings of trust and confidence she was slowly drawing near her end.

In 1868 it was thought her last hour had come, and Father Marie, who loved *La Bonne Mère* as a son, wrote to her: "We knew you were ill, and we started to pray for you with all our might. . . . We cannot spare you yet. You must see Sion in Rome, and after that, if you will have me, we will go to Heaven together. I shall want to hide behind you when God calls me."¹

But neither Mother Sophie nor Father Marie were destined to see a House of the Order founded in Rome.² But now that her beloved Congregation had

¹ Letter of June 12th, 1868.

² A House in Rome was founded in 1887.

been approved by Rome she could say with holy Simeon :

"Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace.

"Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation,

"Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples :

"A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke ii. 29-32).

Disquieting symptoms had appeared and wishing that the venerable patient should make the last sacrifice with full consciousness Mother Louise asked her if she would receive Extreme Unction and Viaticum. This was on January 5th, 1870, and Father Théodore administered both Sacraments in the presence of the Community. Then, endeavouring to control all signs of emotion, he proceeded to say : "My dear Daughter, you have just received very great graces through the merits of Jesus Christ; you are surrounded by fervent prayers. There is nothing left for you to do but to say 'Thank God!' and 'My God I am Thine, I am coming to Thee, I offer Thee my heart and my life! I offer Thee the whole family of Sion!' . . . Carry away in your soul all your solicitude for this beloved family and then give thanks again and again!"

She made her last Communion on January 14th, and on the 19th, the Eve of the Miracle of Rome, just as Father Théodore, who was saying Mass for her, began the Memento of the Dead, her soul entered its eternal home. On the evening of the funeral which

took place at Grandbourg the Father wrote to the Nuns in the different distant Convents as follows: "I seek our *Bonne Mère* in Heaven, surrounded by the Sisters who have preceded her. Our Saviour said: '*I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me*' (John xvii. 24). . . .

"Who are His disciples if not those who have denied themselves and left all things to follow their Divine Master? Our *Bonne Mère* is with God. She has gone with her pure and loving thoughts to the next world; there she will fulfil her mission, and in Heaven she will ask that the foundations of Sion may be strengthened. May we all meet her there one day."

"The memory of *La Bonne Mère* is, and ever will be, a precious memory in our hearts," Father Marie had said long before. And the Daughters of Sion will re-echo this feeling of veneration and gratitude from age to age, in the words which their Founder wrote in memory of Mother Sophie Stouhlen: "May her memory be for ever blessed and honoured in every Convent of Sion!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR AND THE COMMUNE (1870—1871)

IN the following April Father Ratisbonne went back once more to Rome to consider a project for uniting his small Congregation to that of the Augustinian Fathers who offered him a share in the great privileges of their own Order, now many centuries old. The Papal City presented a most imposing spectacle as the Bishops summoned from all quarters of the globe were then assembled in Council at the Vatican. Father Ratisbonne had hardly settled down before he was asked by Mgr. Raess to take the place of his "Theologian," Mgr. Freppel, who had been promoted to the See of Angers. The good Father did not see his way to accepting this offer, but owing to his friendship with Cardinal de Bonnechose, whose house was frequented in the evenings by a large majority of the Fathers in Council, he had many opportunities of noting the different opinions of each. He himself had given his own views quite unmistakably in an article written at the end of 1869, headed *Le Pape*, which was neither more nor less than a simple, concise, and explicit act of faith in the Primacy of Peter and in his

mysterious infallibility as perpetuated through his successors. On his return to Paris he said to the Nuns and pupils before Mass on July 21st: "Unite your thanksgivings to those I am going to offer to Our Lord. The infallibility of the Pope, so fiercely attacked and disputed in our time, was solemnly proclaimed in Rome on the 18th by the voice of the great Council. . . . It is a remarkable fact that the Dogma of the Infallibility was promulgated in spite of all human opposition. Thrones are tottering, the air is full of rumours of war, the nations are angry and troubled, and no human institution seems stable, yet this is the moment when the Church, more living, more cohesive, and stronger than ever, affirms the perpetual indefectibility of the Pontiff who governs Her in the name of Her Divine Master."¹

France was now being shaken to her foundations by the declaration of war which she had launched at Prussia, and the Bishops hurriedly returned to their Sees, several of which were already surrounded by the invading armies.

"God has suddenly awakened Christians from their slumber," wrote Father Théodore; "an unexpected and terrible call summons them to the battlefield; pleasures are merged in grief, the foundations of earthly riches are shaken and scattered in all directions, and all around is consternation. We must recognise the Hand of God in these events, but that Hand strikes only to heal. Our duty is to pray and hope.

¹ Collection of addresses for special occasions.

We may have to suffer if such should be the Will of God.”¹

Full of faith in the healing virtue of chastisement inflicted on nations as a whole, he goes on to say : “France is better than those who rule her destinies. She has still within her a living germ of Catholic belief, which, in the shadow of the Cross, may bring consolation to the Church. This is the right view to take when we see the strange happenings of the present time.”²

The reverses of Weisseburg and Woerth had caused the utmost dismay in France, and, in view of possibly greater disasters to come Father Théodore had left nothing undone for the protection of the younger Nuns. All those at the Mother-House (where some twenty postulants and novices were preparing for Clothing and Profession on the Feast of the Assumption) were calm and undisturbed. The ceremonies took place like the last rays of a setting sun before a night of horror, and the next day members of the Community began to migrate. Some went to England and to other Houses of Sion, some to distant parts of France beyond the war zone.

“The position is formidable,” wrote the good Father . . . “my greatest regret is the dispersion of my beloved flock ; each of my sheep takes away part of my heart, so that I suffer the pangs of a martyr who is being torn to pieces.”

¹ Letter of August 12th, 1870, to Mother Rose Valentin.

² Letter of August 25th, 1870, to the House at Worthing.

By the time Paris was completely invested the Community was reduced to fifty Nuns prepared for any eventuality. Father Ratisbonne's Daughters had begged him to seek safety for himself, but he had refused, saying: "Under present circumstances duty keeps me where danger is. God will take care of me if I can be of any use. I cannot think that my life is more precious than that of so many others. . . . I shall take no risks but simply go through my daily duties and trust to the protection of the Blessed Virgin."¹

He had safeguarded for the Mother-General communication with the rest of the Congregation by transferring her momentarily to London. Mother Emilie Lagarmitte was left in charge of the Mother-House, where she was to have full scope for her charity and intelligent initiative. A certain number of boarders and day-boarders remained; the school was still open, and a military hospital was being organised under the management of the *Val-de-Grâce*.

Father Théodore had only kept with him his assistant, Father Courtade, and one other of his priests. The first privation, and by no means the least, was the absence of news. The besieged were kept informed only of the disasters which were now following rapidly on one another. The month of October opened with the surrender of Strasbourg and closed with the capitulation of Metz. Terrible was

¹ Letter of September 15th, 1870, to the Sisters who had taken refuge at St. Omer.

the grief felt in the Sion Community where there were so many natives of Alsace-Lorraine. Letters were sent by balloon-post, and afterwards by carrier-pigeons, but these winged messengers brought no special communications. "Not even a sheet of paper can pass the horrible girdle of iron which surrounds the capital," wrote Father Théodore on November 3rd. But under his influence the hundred and thirty-two days which elapsed between the investment of Paris and the armistice became days of salvation for many. All the arrangements which had been made both for spiritual and temporal welfare under existing circumstances were quietly carried out. The good Father blessing the kitchen range, had said: "I pray that you may never come to absolute want, for you have to share the necessaries of life with those poorer than ourselves. . . ." And by his wish the weekly distributions of food were never discontinued, even when nothing remained to divide except rations of black bread. This was indeed the time to bear in mind that *Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (Matt. iv. 4), and Father Théodore carefully nourished his flock with that Divine word. Between September, 1870, and February, 1871, more than two hundred sick and wounded soldiers were received into the hospital. "My children," Mother Emilie said to them, "you belong to the house now, and therefore we do not exclude you from the Chapel." This indirect invitation sufficed once and for all, and many of the men taking to

heart sermons intended for the Nuns and pupils only made their peace with God. Twelve of them died very holy deaths; one young man of twenty-one said he was happy to die and knew that he would "never be more fit to appear before God, nor more anxious to go to Him and be protected from his own weakness."

But Father Théodore had to be equally watchful over the rest of his flock. The prevalent epidemics took toll of both Sisters and children and two Nuns died in less than three months. The Founder upheld the courage of all around him by his own strength of soul: "*Benedicamus Domino in omni tempore!*" was his answer to each new trial. On November 10th Mgr. Darboy visited the hospital. "My dear Daughters," he said to the Nuns, "your weapon is prayer; you must pray much! We have all sinned, and we are all being weighed in the balance, but unfortunately it is not the most guilty who are the most repentant. Do penance for them and for yourselves and let your supplications be unceasing."

The prelate blessed the assembled Community, and after spending a few moments in the school entered his carriage and drove away. Sion was never to see him again. The Festival of Christmas came like a glimpse of Heaven and on New Year's Day the Founder wished his children "an increase of faith and the spirit of prayer." During the following days the firing was terrific. More than eight hundred shells fell on different parts of the town in one day, and beneath

these showers of projectiles the number of victims round Sion multiplied. It became necessary to seek shelter in the cellars and in a room where the vaulted ceiling offered some protection. During the night of January 11th two large bombs filled with high explosives hit the Refectory and blew everything to fragments but without injuring anyone. Until the 28th the Community endured this life of terror, and from hour to hour the truth of the Psalmist's words was borne in on all at Sion: *Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei cæli commorabitur.*¹

The anniversary of Mother Sophie's death and the 20th of January were commemorated, as in the days of persecution in the Catacombs. "At the entrance to the cellars," says a Nun, describing the scene, "was a humble altar with no decorations beyond the six candlesticks. A bench served as Communion-rail and separated the priest from the congregation. The Community faced the Altar, the children were on the left in a sort of crypt lit by a lantern and a lamp standing on a block shed a mysterious light over the assembly. The voice of the priest and of the server, the bell announcing the most solemn parts of the Holy Sacrifice, the *Pater dimitte* (no longer sung, but whispered after the Elevation), the many communicants, the priest's blessing, the deep absorption in prayer only broken by the sound of shells exploding. . . . All this produced an indescribable impression. Death

¹ "He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Heaven" (Ps. xc. 1).

was near at hand and the veil between us and the next world seemed lifting before our eyes."

The good Father sent his distant Daughters balloon-letters calculated as far as possible to reassure them: "I am so sorry for your anxiety . . . things seem sadder at a distance than when one is on the spot. Providence takes care of us in proportion to our needs. It is quite true that our district is being shelled, but we have done what prudence dictates and Our Blessed Lady is watching over us."

The Commune was inaugurating its reign by tentative acts of violence, and Father Théodore wishing to make the best of things, wrote: "The insignificant risings which have occurred from time to time since the siege generally take place near the *Hôtel de Ville*. Nothing of the kind reaches us here; we are isolated by the bombardment."

And after the armistice he adds: "God, who brings low, can also raise up. No! France will not perish; in spite of all the harm she has done what works of charity has she not given to the world! Innumerable are the missionaries she has sent out to all parts of the universe, and multitudes of servants of God born on French soil have filled the world with the marvels of their self-sacrifice!"

Letters soon arrived from all parts of France and foreign countries testifying that *Notre Dame de Sion* had protected the souls consecrated to Her service. Five months before Father Théodore had gone to Grandbourg to put the house there and the twelve

Nuns under the care of Mother Sophie. He had stood by her tomb and had said aloud : " Present yourself, dear Mother, before the Throne of God and tell Him that while on earth you never once failed in obedience to the Father He had given you, and implore Him to allow you during the war to carry out in its entirety the Mission this same Father confides to you to-day."

Never was order better obeyed. The Convent, although surrounded by empty houses and standing in a part of France which was invested by the German army, nevertheless escaped all harm. The Mayor of Evry, Monsieur Decauville, watched over the little Community as if it had been his own family. On his wise suggestion the Nuns although still looking after the children and poor of the village, offered their services to five hospitals opened in some neighbouring châteaux. Grandbourg was destined to be a haven of refuge during the hard times still to come. Father Théodore on his return from a hurried journey to St. Omer where his refugee Nuns had been asked to superintend a very flourishing orphanage, found the revolutionary spirit in full ferment.

" We had hoped," he said sadly, " that after the calamities of the siege we should have had a little peace, and now all our anxieties are renewed ! I try to believe that mercy will follow justice ; but, alas ! men are still very far away from God, from the Saviour whom they know not, and from the Church !"

It was necessary to take measures of precaution, so the neophytes, the few pupils who had just reassem-

bled, and nearly all the Nuns, were sent to Grand-bourg. But grave fears were entertained for the safety of Father Théodore. Certain incidents of the siege had revealed the fact that he was the object of a great deal of sectarian bitterness. Sometimes an emissary would come asking information about the Order and its work; at others visitors would arrive, and on pretext of religious questions would ask to consult the Rev. Father whom they had seen in the Chapel.

Mother Emilie's presence of mind frustrated all these attempts for a time, but on the evening of November 23rd a serious occurrence warned them of what might be expected. Father Théodore had shown himself for a few moments at his window in the hope that his presence might check a patriot who was loudly knocking at the door and trying to force the Superior to admit two very suspicious-looking women. The audacious intruder departed, but the exact spot where the priest appeared had been duly noted, and a few hours later a shot was heard. Such sounds were not unusual in those troubled times, and no one would have been alarmed but for the fact that next day a bullet was found lying on the floor of the good Father's room. It had gone through the window-pane and flattened itself against a corner of the wall above the *prie-Dieu* on which he was kneeling. Without interrupting his prayers or calling anyone's attention he simply moved away. The shot came from a house opposite, but Providence preserved the intended victim. Father Théodore allowed the police to be in-

formed, but without his name being mentioned or any further notice being taken of the matter. Mother Emilie no longer in any doubt as to what the Communists intended Father Théodore's fate to be did all in her power to induce him to leave. He only consented at the last extremity and arrived at Grandbourg on March 31st, three days before the arrest of the hostages. Weeks of great distress followed during which the safety of the majority of his Daughters was his only solace in the bitter affliction caused by the events then taking place in Paris. "Those who of late years worked on Sundays and holidays," he wrote, "have ended by shooting each other on Easter Sunday. In ceasing to be Christians they have ceased to be men. . . . The present excesses are the logical result of doctrines so long taught and approved. After loudly denying God and the Church, it was natural to throw off all allegiance to authority."¹

Mother Emilie who had accompanied Father Théodore to Grandbourg returned in May to resume her post at the head of the twelve Nuns who had been left in charge of the Mother-House, under Mother Marie Laure Grenier.²

During the day of May 16th some insurgents presented themselves and asked where Father Ratisbonne was, and with an unmistakable intention. They were

¹ Letters of March 9th and April 19th, 1871, to Mother Louise Weywada.

² Mother Marie Laure became, in 1903, the fifth Superior-General of the Congregation.

disconcerted by the sang-froid of the Sister Portress and left without obtaining an answer. Next day the Church of Notre Dame des Victoires and the tomb of the venerable Father Desgenettes were profaned. As a protecting breakwater against the onrush of the rabble Mother Emilie caused a picture of the Sacred Heart to be affixed to all the doors with the following inscription: "*Cease! The Heart of Jesus is with us!*"

"On Monday the 22nd," she writes in the account sent afterwards to Father Théodore, "we heard that the Versailles troops had entered Paris by the *Porte de Neuilly* and the *Porte de Chaillot*. . . . At ten o'clock an army corps arrived in our district and was billeted in the Church of *Notre Dame des Champs*, the insurgents being quartered in a neighbouring building in the *Boulevard Parnasse*. Shots were exchanged, and towards one o'clock the fighting became very active. . . . The alarm bell had been ringing since morning in all the churches. The Barricade Commission issued stricter orders and nearly all traffic was suspended. At seven in the evening knocking was heard at our avenue gates: the National Guards of the insurrection were there. Mother Emilie opened the courtyard gate. The commander was in a state of violent excitement, saying they had been fired on from *Notre Dame des Champs*, and insisted on forcing his way in to find out where the shots came from. Mother Emilie protested against this violation of domicile, and claimed protection as being an Alsatian subject. . . . They hesitated for a moment, and then

tried intimidation saying it was a question of life or death. 'Gentlemen, our house is under the protection of the Flag of the Commune; you can only enter by order of the Commune.'¹

"They hesitated but finally consented to obtain the necessary authorisation. At half-past eight as we were going into Chapel for evening prayers loud cries were heard outside the door of No. 61; we were obliged to open it and four men came in carrying a boy-workman of fourteen or fifteen mortally wounded. We laid the dying youth on a bed in the parlour where he died about three-quarters of an hour later without recovering consciousness.

"Next morning at seven o'clock our avenue was again invaded by the insurgent National Guards and the door was giving way under the strokes of their bayonets when Mother Emilie and Mother Marie Laure appeared. The same pretext was given as on the previous day: they wanted to take possession of our house so as to observe from the upper rooms the movements of the Army of Versailles. Mother Emilie remonstrated as before, adding that our house was the House of Peace and not a fortress of war; that we had received their wounded, one of whom had just died under our roof, and that consequently we refused to allow a shot to be fired on our premises. When conditions had been laid down and accepted, Mother

¹ On May 19th the Commune had sent a delegate, Monsieur Salvador Daniel, to ask the Community to take in sick and wounded Communists.

Marie Laure and Sister Julienne conducted the commanders and some of their men to the upper storeys, and in accordance with our wish they concealed their military badges, so as not to draw attention to the House. They seemed satisfied with the result of their inspection, and left us in the hope that we should have no more of them. But they had posted sentinels in the garden, and half an hour afterwards other chiefs, this time wearing masonic badges, came for further parleying. They took even less notice of our remonstrances, and paid no attention whatever to Dr. Billard who was in charge of our hospital and who emphatically protested against the intrusion. Meanwhile a barricade was being erected in front of the house of our neighbour, Monsieur Bissey, which was already being attacked by the Versailles troops. Immediate help for the wounded was required as the first man fell at our very door and we had not yet put up the international flag. We were obliged to take him in. He was a boy of nineteen, one of the new insurgent militia known as *Les Vengeurs de Paris*. At first he was quite unmanageable but Mother Emilie's kindness won him over and quieted him. Killed and wounded poured into the hospital within the next few minutes, and among them we recognised some of the roughest ringleaders who had been to us that morning. The corpse of one of the commanders was brought in covered with wounds, and still bearing his masonic emblems. . . . By the evening we had received between seventy and eighty men.

“A cannon for the defence of the barricade was required at the corner of the *Rue Bréa* and the *Rue Vavin*, but it could not be got there owing to the other side-streets being barricaded, so a right of way was demanded through our avenue and the school playground, to reach the *Rue d'Assas* and the *Rue Notre Dame des Champs*. This violation immediately resulted in the cannon being captured by the Versailles troops, but the insurgents were not to be discouraged. Another cannon appeared, and as there was a slight delay in unlocking our door one of the chiefs ordered it to be taken through the hospital. The horses of the gun-carriage were already under our cloisters when Monsieur Hubert, a kind neighbour who had been helping indefatigably ever since morning, opened the doors of the school. Then for nearly two days reinforcements of all kinds, men and munitions, passed that way. A steady stream of dead and wounded poured into the hospital until eleven o'clock at night, and there was hardly time to close the doors before they had to be reopened to receive the crowds who were driven to take shelter from the firing and from certain death. Lisbonne, an insurgent colonel, with several of his men, came more than once during the night to warn us officially that they intended blowing up the powder magazine at the Luxembourg if the barricade was taken, the said powder magazine being a few hundred yards from our house. . . . Towards midnight Lisbonne hurriedly told us that if we wanted to escape the destruction of

the whole neighbourhood we had better follow him. We answered that it was our duty to stay with the wounded and after that they removed a great many of their own men. The morning dawned at last—the Feast of *Notre Dame Auxiliatrice*, and we went up to the Chapel and prayed with all our hearts! An hour later we were looking at a very different scene. The noise of the fighting was getting louder and violent shouting forced us to open the courtyard gates as men were rushing in to escape instant death. An insurgent commander, pistol in hand, stood at the entrance to the hospital threatening to blow out the brains of the first deserter. The stampede was checked and the firing proceeded. Towards morning the tottering barricade was reinforced, the cannon began firing again, and each soldier who ignited the gun-cotton fell dead or seriously wounded. Our gates stood wide open to receive man after man, and the doorstep was streaming with blood. . . . A few hours later the insurgents, seeing all was lost, proceeded to the usual extremities of Communist warfare, that is to say by setting fire to adjacent street corners with gunpowder and petroleum.

“We as well as the inhabitants of the threatened houses were again warned of the coming explosions, and the ark of safety suggested by the Communists themselves was the Convent of *Notre Dame de Sion*! A crowd of frightened old men, women, and children rushed through our hospital into the ground-floor rooms and cloisters. It was a

moment of agonising suspense! Each family solemnly embraced and then waited for what was to come. Mother Emilie and Mother Marie Laure went to the Chapel; Mother Emilie took the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle and the Nuns crowded round her. Not knowing what awaited us we remained calm, filled with a strength which certainly did not come from ourselves. An explosion took place in one of the houses . . . all the windows near were blown into fragments while the fire fed with petroleum spread simultaneously and with terrifying rapidity to several other points. Immediately a water chain was organised, starting from the fountain in our garden. . . . At this moment a woman shouted 'Here come the Versailles troops!' and her exclamation nearly caused the whole crowd to be massacred, for the insurgents being hemmed in and having to escape through our garden, believed we had betrayed them.

"They had pointed their rifles at us, when the Divine protection and Monsieur Billard's presence of mind saved us. Our courageous doctor faced the ruffians and implored them not to shoot, promising them a safe exit through the open gateway of the *Avenue Vavin*. After a terrible interval of suspense the insurgents (fearing the arrival of the troops who were already battering at the gate of the *Rue Notre Dame des Champs*) rushed away in the direction suggested by the doctor. From the air-shafts of the cellar the voice of the commander of the Versailles Army could be heard giving the word to attack, while

the insurgents retreated towards the Luxembourg powder magazine. Then only did Mother Emilie open the gates to the Versailles troops who at once recognised us as friends for we had never for a moment left off our Religious Habit. We warned them that as soon as the insurgents caught sight of them they would blow up the magazine. The commanding officer paused for a moment and then resolutely faced his men: 'My boys,' he said, 'I have strict orders to advance. . . . Forward, march!' Then, turning to Mother Emilie, he said: 'Pray for us, Sister!' and the men repeated: 'Say a prayer for us, Sister!'

"Meanwhile our wall was being broken down with pickaxes to let through more crowds of refugees whose houses were falling about their ears. This work of rescue was hardly concluded when a terrible detonation threw everyone on the ground. The powder magazine at the Luxembourg had exploded! This was about one o'clock in the afternoon, and the little company of Versailles troops had just been perceived. As soon as we had recovered ourselves we counted, no one was missing, and to our great consolation we saw the battalion of our brave soldiers returning through the garden. 'Sister,' said the commanding officer to Mother Emilie, 'all my men are safe. We were only about twenty feet from the powder magazine. They trusted in God, and He protected them!'

"The wounded Versailles soldiers were now in the beds which the insurgents had occupied in our hos-

pital, and the crowd of refugees was gradually dispersing. We had only now with us a few families who had nowhere to go and nothing left of their belongings. . . . As soon as it was possible to get through the streets we sent word of our safety to Father Courtade, who had been in great danger himself. . . . They had been to the *Rue Duguay-Trouin* to find him but Sister Rosalie with great presence of mind poured out drink for the seven or eight men who came, which gave Father Courtade time to seek refuge with the Little Sisters of the Poor. It was not until the following evening that we heard he was safe. He came at once to the hospital. Ever since we have been watching from a distance the struggle going on in Paris. We could tell which districts were burning by the smell of gunpowder, the thick wreaths of smoke and the flaming sky.

"As well as looking after our wounded, we had to get the necessary repairs done at once, and make good the damage caused in the house by the gunpowder explosions . . . there was not a door or window left. . . . Every hour of the day one or other of the insurgents' families arrived asking for news of a missing father or son. It was not difficult to guess what had become of them! We have had some sad scenes with the bereaved relatives. . . . But we feel more certain than ever after the terrible storm we have just passed through that God never fails those who put their trust in Him!"

During these anxious days those at Grandbourg

could hear the noise of the explosion of the *Gros Caillou* Cartridge Factory and see the whirlwind of fire rising above the monuments; all night long the sky was lit up by flames. Then came the still more sinister news of the murder of the Archbishop and the hostages. "We have been through indescribable anxiety," wrote Father Théodore in the first shock of his grief. . . . "I trembled for our Sisters, for Father Courtade, and our friends. *Notre Dame de Sion* has protected them all. I myself have been most marvelously preserved, had Mother Emilie not persuaded me to join the greater part of the Community at Grandbourg, you would have seen my name amongst the hostages."¹

"I did not believe there would be such a murderous persecution of the clergy, I had forgotten that the first shot fired at a priest when the siege began was aimed at me."²

"Our Archbishop and many other ecclesiastics have been the ransom for all," he adds. "It was necessary that innocent blood should cry to God from amidst so much crime and blasphemy. . . . We must pray and hope! God has begun a work of regeneration of which we cannot now see the far-reaching results, but He will accomplish it in His own good time. . . ."

Soon travelling became safe enough for the longed-for return of the exiled Sisters. From the mountains of Auvergne, the manor-houses of Limousin and Nor-

¹ Letter of May 1st, 1871, to Mother Louise Weywada.

² Letter of June 2nd, 1871, to the Convent at Jassy.

mandy, from the moorlands of Brittany and the hospitable Convents of Dorat, Bapaume, and Esquermes, from the Swiss cantons, the seaside, and the shores of the Mediterranean, they came back full of gratitude to the friends who had sheltered them, but happy beyond words to find themselves once again in their Sion home. Every Nun down to the youngest novice and postulant had remained staunch to her vocation. Many had been miraculously preserved from danger and Father Théodore wished to commemorate their preservation in a permanent way. "I should like," he had said when things were at their worst, "to put up a statue in the Mother-House of the Blessed Virgin seated with the Infant Jesus on Her lap. And I should like the statue to become the object of a devotion similar to that which is practised in the Church of St. Augustine in Rome where the Faithful come in such great numbers to kiss the feet of the Madonna."

His wish was fulfilled on May 24th, 1872. On that anniversary of martyrdom and deliverance Father Théodore blessed the Statue of his choice in the presence of the Community, the pupils, and the friends who owed their safety to the same blessed protection. The pedestal bears an inscription expressive of the good Father's piety: *Accepimus eam in nostra*. The Daughters of Sion who have come and gone since that day still repeat these words, and those who come after them will continue to do so, as with loving confidence they kiss the foot which crushes the serpent's head.

CHAPTER XV

YEARS OF PROSPERITY (1872—1883)

THE period of calm which succeeded the disasters of 1870 and 1871 allowed of the usual work being resumed at the Mother-House, although the Second General Chapter which should have taken place then was not held until the following year. Mother Louise who was then sixty-three had held the reins of office for twelve years, and the valiant Religious had worked laboriously for the Congregation both before and during that time! Her frequent and long journeys had not been mere visits to her distant Daughters, for often while with them, as in England and Roumania for instance, she had had to share their arduous work. The faithful Superior was beginning to feel her strength unequal to her heavy task, and Father Théodore had said reluctantly: "Mother Louise will be glad to be relieved of the burden of her office."

He judged by himself for he went on to say: "If I were fortunate enough to find a priest who would take on my duties I should think it a privilege to be Chaplain to any religious institution, especially in Jerusalem. But I should not like to choose and would go wherever I was sent, so anxious am I to be under obedience."¹

¹ Meeting of the Chapter held in 1872.

Mother Rose was elected unanimously at the next General Chapter and accepted her task in a spirit of courageous devotion. She had replaced Mother Louise at Constantinople and was now about to succeed her again, while Mother Louise, now merely a local Superior, was to be sent to Marseilles to pave the way for a new foundation amidst all kinds of obstacles and hindrances.

"We may have more difficulties to face," said Father Théodore at the close of the Chapter; "the world is in a deplorable state and hatred of God increases daily. There is even a new kind of crime which has never been committed before, quite young children are being snatched away from Jesus Christ to be brought up as infidels. That indeed is the sin of sins. It must grieve the Sacred Heart more than anything and I cannot believe that such enormities can go unpunished. What will happen I cannot say, but what I do know is that we shall be brought safely through this crisis as we were brought through what has happened already. We may have to suffer . . . and we must be ready to offer our life-blood as Jesus Christ did in order to fulfil our eternal destiny, but we must remember that the Master has said: *Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me* (John xvii. 24)."

He concluded by urging great devotion to the Sacred Heart, not by mere formulas of prayer, but in the spirit of St. Paul when he said: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus* (Phil. ii. 5).

“Devotion to the Sacred Heart means devotion to the Holy Eucharist, it supposes an interior life, a spirit of prayer, and the practice of those virtues taught us by Our Saviour when He said: *Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of Heart*. For the religious soul it is the enkindling of that fire which Jesus came upon earth to bring. It is the secret of obtaining from His Divine Heart something of the zeal He felt for His Heavenly Father’s Glory; something of His immense love for His Blessed Mother; of His tender love for little children; and lastly, in that Heart we find the courage to realise by the generous practice of charity the most ardent of His wishes: *Sint unum* . . . ‘Let them be one.’”

Providence had evidently inspired the choice of Mother Rose as Superior-General. The good Father was able to depend on her in perfect security, for her vigorous initiative was accompanied by a real genius for governing. This being so, although he believed he would be spared for some time yet to complete his work, he was enabled to watch matters develop under his supervision without necessarily taking action himself. Ten years had elapsed since the formal approbation of the Rule, and the time had now come for it either to be renewed or definitely confirmed.

As the Founder’s personal intervention was no longer necessary he deputed Mother Rose to conclude the negotiations. Her companion on this delicate mission was Mother Marie Paul Hibon, Secretary-General, who for some time had enjoyed the perfect

trust and confidence of the entire Congregation, which she governed later herself for eighteen years with great dignity and a fervent love for souls. When the Superior-General arrived in Rome in 1874, she found that Mgr. Franchi (who had known her well and greatly appreciated her work in Constantinople) was Prefect of Propaganda, so that the successor of Cardinal Barnabo was also a friend and patron of Sion. Mgr. Franchi did not think the Nuns need be detained in Rome longer than a month, and urged that the affair should be concluded with as little delay as possible. Happily there was very little to modify. Cardinal Bilio, President of the Holy Office, declared that the Rule was "wise, excellent, written under the inspiration of God;" and the Approbation was definitely confirmed. It was a very grateful task for the two petitioners to make their thanksgiving at the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff. "Ah! the Daughters of Sion," said Pius IX. going towards them, "the Daughters of Father Ratisbonne! Well! Now you can be quite happy, your Constitutions are approved; the next thing is to see that they are properly obeyed. . . . Those dear Ratisbonnes," he went on to say with an indescribable accent of affection and pleasure, "tell them I bless them with all my heart!"

The Church of *Sant'Andrea delle Fratte*, as may be imagined, had been a great attraction to these the first of the Sion Nuns to cross the threshold of that blessed Sanctuary.

"On the day of our departure," writes the Superior,

"we poured out our hearts once more before the throne of Grace and Mercy which the Blessed Virgin had chosen for Herself. Several times we rose up to go, but had to kneel down once more—there seemed so much to say."¹

The Decree of Final Approbation is dated December 14th, 1874; and every year on that date, as on the Anniversary of September 8th, 1863, a hymn of thanksgiving is heard throughout all the Convents of Sion. "Draw nearer and ever nearer to each other in the Heart and love of Jesus Christ," Father Théodore had said at the time of the rejoicings over the great grace just received, "and love your Rule with its twice-reiterated approval; it will strengthen you in virtue, safeguard your vocations, and guide you on your way to Heaven."

From the earliest days of her government Mother Rose had shown by what she was accomplishing at the Mother-House what even the most distant Houses of the Order might hope she would do for them.

The school in Paris grew and prospered, and the school premises had become too small for the number of children. New buildings were added, the *Neophytai* was transferred to Grandbourg, and 1875 saw the Chapel on its way to completion. It is the work of Monsieur Daumet, and is built in the style of the Italian Renaissance. The idea was that it should be spacious and bright, and symbolise the virtues of faith, hope and charity which attract to the One True

¹ Diary of the Journey to Rome.

Lord Jew and Christian alike. And God's Providence so ordered events that the Statue of *Notre Dame de Sion* was erected on the spot prepared for it, exactly at noon on April 14th, 1877, fifty years to the day and hour from Father Ratisbonne's own Baptism. The figure is of white marble, and nearly nine feet high.

Father Théodore had the great happiness of consecrating the Chapel on June 29th. Surrounded by the priests of *Notre Dame de Sion* the venerable Founder pronounced the liturgical prayers and offered the Holy Sacrifice. He was much moved by the contrast between the beauty of the sanctuary and the poor and humble beginnings of Sion, and felt, as he says himself, "brought face to face with some of God's greatest mercies."

Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, who came a few days later to give Confirmation, said to him: "I love the work you have founded under the inspiration of God, because of the good it will do in the Church. One of the greatest consolations of my ministry is the thought of the graces it will bring and, judging by the results already obtained they will be manifold."

"The year now drawing to its close," wrote Father Théodore on December 8th, "will count as one of the most favoured by God in the history of Sion, for it has witnessed great changes in the Mother-House. What have we more to hope for save a steady increase in the good work begun?"

Even greater things, however, were to be achieved by the foundation of a more distant Mission than any

as yet undertaken by the Order. In 1877 Madame de Guardia, wife of the President of the Republic of Costa Rica, had sent her two daughters to school at *Notre Dame de Sion* in Paris, and was so pleased with the education they received, and so attracted to the Nuns themselves, that she wished her own country to possess a Convent like the one she had grown to love so much. Her idea was sympathetically received. Negotiations were begun between the Apostolic Delegate and the Government of Costa Rica, and all plans having been approved in Rome, preparations for departure were made. A sailing-vessel started in advance, taking over whatever was required for the new foundation and which it was thought might not be procurable on the spot. "This is a seed which will fructify," said Father Théodore, "and who knows if we may not end by having many more schools in America?"¹ It is rather a long way off certainly but that is no drawback to our brave Missionary Nuns who are only too happy to prove their love and devotion to Our Lord."

On October 20th, 1878, five Choir-Nuns and four Lay-Sisters, headed by Mother Barthélemy Rich, left the Mother-House to plant the flag of *Notre Dame de Sion* on the shores of the New World.

"My dear children," Father Théodore wrote to them

¹ This presentiment soon came true. Not many years after the death of Father Théodore there were houses of the Order in Brazil, the United States, and Canada ; others had been founded in Europe and even in Australia.

in a letter intended to be read when they were well out at sea, "we are travelling to the harbour of a Heavenly Fatherland; the journey is hard but the arrival will be full of delight. Fear nothing, you are in the hands of God. You should invoke frequently the Guardian Angels of America that they may open wide their gates to your Apostolate. Invoke also those Missionary Saints who so generously and gladly trod the path of sacrifice for the love of Jesus Christ. The way of sacrifice is the way of the Saints; may you sanctify yourselves upon it as they did!"

From Bordeaux to Santander the sea was very rough but after that the ship made good speed and on November 6th, after an *unbroken* run of fourteen days, the Virgin Isles, first-fruits of American territory, were visible between sky and sea, and on the 18th the "Colombia" reached Colon, the end of her journey.

"We ought to have called the ship 'La France,'" the missionaries said, "for while we were on board it seemed to be still our native land. But when the Captain, the mate and the whole crew accompanied us with every mark of respect and attention to the train which was to take us to Panama we realised to the full the extent of the sacrifices we were making, and what we had left."

The next stage was a three days' crossing from Panama to Puntarénas, a Costa Rican port on the Pacific, but the ship went so slowly that the travellers preferred landing on the hospitable soil of Central America, and here the picturesque and absolutely

novel part of their journey began. It now became necessary, say the Nuns, to wear *sombreros*,¹ "surmounted by large white muslin veils, to keep off the great heat of the sun." But the question was by what means to get to their destination. The French Agent had advised them to travel in an ox-cart but Madame de Guardia had sent horses for them so they decided to use the latter. Early next morning they mounted their steeds, no easy matter by the flickering light of a single candle and considering that only one of the ten Nuns knew how to ride.

The sun was just rising in a radiant sky when the cavalcade started. Their road lay along a stretch of sand by the sea, while on the other side were beautiful trees and a gently flowing stream. After they had been ferried across a rushing torrent, the road seemed nothing but ups and downs. The beauty of the scenery was beyond description, with its thick woods, cataracts frothing down the gorges, and glimpses of the Pacific Ocean seen between the mountains; but, alas! the state of the only road (over fifty miles long) from Puntarénas to Alajuela was beyond description too! Not a yard of the ground was level, and it was nothing but flints and ruts, where the horses were afraid to put their feet. . . . There was not a single village, hut, or inhabitant along the whole of this road, with its three equidistant stations, nor any living thing but the monkeys in the forests and the large black birds peculiar to the country.²

¹ Panama straw hats.

² *Sapilotes*.

However, the sight of telegraphic wires indicated the approach to civilisation, and they were soon flashing messages to announce the Nuns' arrival. The President met the travellers at the first stopping-place and a short conversation ensued, rather hindered by the fact that he could not speak French, and they possessed only the most rudimentary knowledge of Spanish. Next day, which was December 6th, Madame de Guardia and her daughter arrived, accompanied by the Governor of Alajuela and other important personages. The road being now practicable for wheeled vehicles several of the Nuns got into carriages, while the others finished their journey on horseback escorted by about forty or fifty other riders. Night had fallen when they reached Alajuela, but the moon shone brightly as they reached the House prepared for them, to the sound of military music. They did not stop long, for the inhabitants were waiting for them in the Cathedral, where their entry was the signal for a *Te Deum*, accompanied by the bells of all the churches in the town. A priest then began to preach, reminding his hearers of the sacrifices these Nuns had made in leaving their country to bring the benefits of Christian education to these distant lands, telling them it had been done for the glory of God and for the honour of France.

Father Théodore's anxiety about the new foundation may be imagined when we remember his solicitude for those Houses nearer home. "I feel," he writes to his American Daughters, "as if God had

put the whole Republic of Costa Rica into my heart. . . . A day never passes without my praying for your Mission which is destined to do such great things. We must admit that the ways of God are wonderful when we see the Daughters of Sion at work in a half-civilised country."¹

Costa Rica was indeed only semi-civilised in some parts and it needed superhuman courage for the Bishop, Monsignor Thiel, to go almost alone in search of the Indian Guatusos, who having been cruelly hunted by rubber-planters now fled from the sight of any European.

Several of the girls of the school in Paris sent out to their American fellow-pupils garments for the Bishop to give to his poor converts before bringing them into civilised society. After reading a description of some of the Nuns' adventures Father Théodore writes: "The account of the visit of the King of the Savages in his shirt-sleeves, and of the Queen, his wife, in her very workaday clothes, excited great enthusiasm in the Novitiate. This kind of description and the details you give of your children create a great desire for the missions, and after reading your letters there is always an increase of zeal for foreign service. . . . Even I myself at 80 years of age feel tempted to mount a horse and ride after your saintly Bishop."²

This zeal expressed itself, however, in founding other Houses in France, and the Convents already

¹ Letters of May 1st, 1880, and December 1st, 1883.

² Letter of January 4th, 1883.

existing in the Motherland had to be strengthened and helped by the good Father's wise counsels.

It was a great joy to him after the Siege of Paris to see the Orphanage at St. Omer transformed into a Convent of Sion; it had sheltered his Nuns during the war when they left the hospitable roof of Madame Hibon. The change had been gradually effected by the prudence and goodwill of Mother Josephine Schaeffer, one of the first of the Sion Nuns. The Convent of St. Omer once founded became a fruitful source of religious vocations. Three chosen souls, trained from their youth to self-sacrifice and works of charity, entered the Congregation; they were Mademoiselle de Folard, who had founded the Orphanage, Mademoiselle Hermant, her Assistant, and Madame Cornet d'Hunval.

The house at Marseilles, founded in 1869, developed slowly. The Fathers Ratisbonne on their way to Rome and to the East had often passed through the city of the "Sacred Heart" and *Notre Dame de la Garde*, and some very dear friends, Monsieur and Madame Magnan-Audiffret, had made their residence in Marseilles a kind of Office where all the business connected with the Sion Missions in Jerusalem and Turkey could be transacted. But after such great kindness it was obvious that fresh demands upon their charity could only be made with the greatest delicacy. One of the Lady Associates at Sion, Madame Pastré de Régny, offered Father Théodore a house she owned in the *Faubourg Ste. Marguerite*,

and it was accepted. So many unexpected difficulties arose before the Nuns could settle there, that it drew from Father Théodore the exclamation: "This gift of Providence is costing us dear; the Sion of Marseilles is coming into existence laboriously. For the present, the foundation must not be considered as anything more than a temporary one. Later on, when we have taken root in the furrow hollowed out for it by the Cross, it will grow and bear fruit. Read St. Theresa and try to become Saints. . . . If you are careful not to give cause of complaint to anyone, prejudice will soon become sympathy."

This prediction was abundantly verified. Later on the Bishop gave, himself, the order to leave *Ste. Marguerite* for a house nearer the centre of the town, where he considered the work so charitably undertaken by the family Magnan, as well as the school opened by the Sisters, would develop more freely.

The change was made in 1878. "We must thank God for what He has done for us in Marseilles," wrote Father Théodore, "and as He has prepared a home for you in the *Rue du Paradis*,¹ you must make your House a heaven upon earth."

About this time there was talk of another Convent by the seaside. Three of the Nuns who had had to leave Paris during the war were brought into contact with Mgr. Thomas, Bishop of La Rochelle,² and he

¹ No. 231, *Rue du Paradis*.

² Later on Archbishop of Rouen.

took a great and fatherly interest in them and their work. "I shall write to your good Father and ask him to leave you here," wrote the Bishop; "and if you do not object to receiving a few Protestant girls, I will send you some and be very glad to welcome your Sisters."

This idea was talked over whenever Mgr. Thomas came to Paris, and in 1877 he announced to the Superior-General that he had induced the Sisters of Providence of Saintes to sell their land at Royan to the Congregation. Royan is one of those seaside pleasure resorts where steady work for souls is more needed than in most places.

A small contingent of pupils remained at Royan all through the year, and to these were added a number of pupils from the School in Paris who only came to Royan for the months of August and September; and a few lady boarders were in residence also in the old *Château de Mons*. Mgr. Thomas hoped that the temporary hospitality offered to the girls from Paris would have good results, and he proved to be right in more than one instance. In 1879 the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Mgr. Donnet, came to Royan to consecrate the Church of *Notre Dame*. The Cardinal had not forgotten that Father Ratisbonne was Honorary Canon of his Eminence's Cathedral, and he greeted the Community most graciously with the words: "I am the Father of your Father, so you are my grandchildren, for Sion is truly a family."

The Royan Convent was only just founded when

another was opened in Paris, in the parish of the Immaculate Conception. But *Bel-Air*, as the house was called, had but a short existence, despite its many opportunities for doing good, the Baptisms and abjurations which had taken place within its walls, and all the care with which Father Théodore watched over its beginnings, for in 1900 a children's hospital was opened close by and the school had to be closed. But good seed sown on good soil is a harvest for all eternity. This is the consoling thought which the Sisters of Sion carried with them into exile, when uprooted from the soil of their beloved France by the law of 1904, they were forced to leave the Houses whose origin we are describing.

Although Providence has opened up other fields for their apostolate they have carried away with them besides the love of their country, the unalterable conviction that one day their work will live again and flourish under the merciful hands of Mary the Protectress of their children's children.

Father Théodore's life was fruitful to the end, and it was God's will that he should see four more Foundations before his death—Smyrna, Ramleh near Alexandria, Tunis, and Trieste. At Smyrna the Congregation was asked, as in the case of Constantinople, to take over a school conducted by the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul.

Mother Electa Valentin, who had spent twenty years as Superior in the Convents of the Holy Land, of Jassy, and of Cadi-Keuï, arrived in Smyrna on

August 11th, 1876; and thanks to the protection of Mgr. Spaccapietra, the new Sion soon became prosperous. The kindly Archbishop had made Father Théodore in 1865 Honorary Vicar-General of his Cathedral, a title always dear to the good Father because of its connection with St. John the Evangelist.

Father Marie although he had always greatly wished to see a Convent in Smyrna, nevertheless added also his persuasions to those of the Christian Brothers, when they asked the Sisters of Sion to open a girls' school at Ramleh, near Alexandria. By a fortunate coincidence Mother Lucie Mayer and her companions arrived there in April, 1880, on the very day commemorated in the *Ordo* of the Diocese as the "Flight into Egypt."

The school at Ramleh was progressing on normal lines when suddenly in 1882 the revolution broke out which ended in the English occupation of the country. The Nuns were obliged to take refuge in Jerusalem, Smyrna and Paris. When they returned to Ramleh, one house alone was standing intact amidst the ruins, and that was the Convent of *Notre Dame de Sion*, occupied during the fiercest of the battles by the Duke of Connaught, son of Queen Victoria and by his Staff. Once again God had protected them.

On December 10th, 1883, Father Théodore who loved to dwell upon the thought of his Egyptian Sion wrote to the Superior: "No distance is capable of separating us. Even in this world we have begun a life of union which is being perfected in sacrifice

and patience, and which will last throughout eternity. . . .”

And the Sisters who were employed in founding a second House in Africa experienced also the truth of this consoling doctrine. From the early days of the Congregation, Mgr. Pavy, Bishop of Algiers, had reminded Father Théodore of the great number of Jews living in these localities, and in October, 1871, Mgr. Lavigerie told the good Father that he hoped some of the Nuns of Sion would soon be sent out to work in Africa. Ten years later at his repeated request it was decided to open a house in Tunis. The Mother-General in petitioning Propaganda for authorisation concluded by saying: “In the town of Tunis there are more than twenty thousand Jews favourably disposed towards Christians. This consideration is a great attraction to the Sisters of Sion whose special vocation is to pray for the conversion of this people.”

Mother Marie Laure made all the preliminary arrangements for this Foundation, and pupils soon came. “The first time we sang the *Pater dimitte*,” writes one of the Nuns, “a nice little Jewish girl arrived, followed by another the next day, and after that many others came, including the three daughters of the Receiver-General of the Tunisian Government.”

The Nuns noticed that Cardinal Lavigerie had a special predilection for this portion of their flock. He seemed to keep for them his most fatherly smile and encouraging words. “I bless you in the name

of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," he said to them, "for I too am an old patriarch"; and the little girls when they went home in the evening never failed to repeat these messages of good-will, which, as a rule, the parents were proud to receive. Father Théodore while appreciating to the full the Cardinal's sympathy constantly urged on his Daughters the necessity of tact and prudence. "Preach by good example only," he repeated; "pray much and learn to wait patiently for God's good time. The harvest will ripen in due season and then you will reap in joy what you have sown in tears."¹

As soon as the Convent in Tunis was firmly established, the Congregation was asked to open another in Trieste. But Father Théodore was not spared to see the development of this House of Sion, although he lived to witness its foundation. A month after the good Father's death the Convent was opened in a town where the worldliness of the inhabitants gave his Daughters full scope for the exercise of their zeal, and the diversity of religions rendered religious teaching particularly necessary.

¹ Letter of April 13th, 1883.

CHAPTER XVI

FATHER MARIE AND HIS WORK (1858—1878)

TWENTY-TWO years had passed since Father Marie introduced the Congregation into the Holy Land, and the story of the foundations made there forms one of the most beautiful chapters in what he calls "The Miraculous History of Notre Dame de Sion." "And considering the obstacles this zealous priest had to overcome, the works accomplished were as real and wonderful a miracle as his conversion itself; but with this difference: in his conversion Father Marie had only to leave everything to the Blessed Virgin, whereas in his work it would appear as if She left everything to him, and from first to last he did not spare himself."¹

To clear away the rubbish accumulated on the site of the future Church, to erect the Sanctuary of the *Ecce Homo*, to found three Orphanages, two for girls, in Jerusalem, and at *St. Jean in Montana*, and a third for boys at *St. Pierre hors des Murs*, and finally, to provide daily for the subsistence of some four hundred persons, were works achieved painfully and

¹ Sermon preached at a Requiem Mass for Father M. A. Ratisbonne on May 15th, 1884, by Father Matthieu Lecomte, O.S.D.



ST. PETER'S INSTITUTE, JERUSALEM (*Boys' Orphanage*).

laboriously by the good Father and which slowly undermined his health. The Sanctuary of the *Ecce Homo* was begun in 1864 as soon as the Convent for the Sisters was finished, and the work went steadily on. After the site had been cleared, plans for the construction were prepared by Monsieur Daumet, the architect who had built the Paris House and Chapel.

"I wish it to be magnificent," Father Marie had said. "Our Lord must be royally and magnificently honoured, *there* where He was so ignominiously treated for our sakes."

The sacred spot on which the Sanctuary stands is carefully specified by Father Marie in his description of the entrance to Pilate's Palace: *Ecce adduco vobis foras*—"Behold I bring Him forth unto you!"

Part of the Forum where Jesus was condemned to death, and of which the marble flooring has been preserved, is enclosed within the precincts of the Church of the *Ecce Homo*, so called, because it was upon one of the three arcades forming the Triumphal Arch that Pontius Pilate pronounced the words: "Behold the Man," as he delivered up the guiltless Lamb of God to the Jews who were thirsting for His blood: *Adjudicavit illis*.

During the long centuries when there was no police supervision and Jerusalem was a mass of ruins, the ignorant and fanatical Mahomedans in attempting to build houses for themselves out of the fallen débris encroached so much upon the public road that what was once a large open space had in course of time

become a narrow street. But it is thanks to these encroachments which we may consider providential that the Congregation owes the possession of quite a large section of the *Via Dolorosa* which is now enclosed in the Sanctuary.

The excavations on the site of the future Church brought to light, as we have already seen, one of the side-arches in a state of perfect preservation, thanks to the mountain of rubbish under which it had been concealed for centuries. The corresponding arch no longer exists, and on its site, on the other side of the street, now stands a Dervish monastery. It is not known on which arch Our Lord was standing when shown to the populace and proclaimed King, but it is quite certain that the principal arch was only used by the Roman Emperors or their representatives. Other persons had to enter the fortress by the side-arches. It is probable that the principal arch was too high for Pilate to mount and address the turbulent crowd, when he could use some gallery or rostrum in the Forum itself; and that he spoke from a "gallery" seems probable, as underneath the side-arch are distinct traces of a cornice or balustrade which must have supported a kind of open balcony capable of holding three persons. "We should like to think, if it be not too presumptuous," concludes Father Marie, "that this side-arch so wonderfully preserved from the general ruin was the one which served as a pedestal for the King of the Jews, and that Divine Providence intended it to come into the possession of the Daughters of

Sion, destined to carry out in this place their work of expiation."

The altar of the *Ecce Homo* is placed in front of the arch so as to leave room to pass into the Sacristy. It is entirely built of the flag-stones of the Lithostrotos, and at the back there are three medallions bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and on the reredos is the inscription: *Corona tribulationis effloruit in coronam gloriæ*. The sacred arch bears traces of the ravages of time, and a pillar, also enclosed in the Sanctuary, connects it to the great central archway over the *Via Dolorosa*.

It is about thirteen feet above the floor of the Sanctuary, and spanned by a semi-circle some fifteen feet broad of variegated marbles, on which are the Roman Procurator's words in gold lettering: *Ecce Rex Vester*. It is surmounted by a statue of the *Ecce Homo* by the gifted and generous Polish sculptor Count Sosnowski. Two angels accompany the central figure, one in an attitude of fervent prayer is emblematic of the church, while the other symbolises the mission of *Notre Dame de Sion*, personified by the angel of Israel with clasped hands, arms stretched out in a gesture of pain, and head bent down beneath the weight of repentance. At the feet of the statue lies a royal diadem the combined gift of the great Pontiff Leo XIII. and of the faithful from all parts of the world.¹

¹ The decoration of the Sanctuary was not quite completed until 1903, long after the death of Father Marie.

Over the choir is a cupola of freestone with twelve windows, and this is surmounted by a dome in copper and a Cross. On the side of the choir which looks out on the *Via Dolorosa* is a rose-window representing the Sacred Monogram from which rays of light fall upon the Crown of Thorns which appears as if dipped in blood. Thousands of pilgrims come yearly to kneel beneath the sacred archway, and to visit the *Via Dolorosa* trodden by Our Lord when He left the Prætorium carrying His Cross. Some large flagstones perfectly preserved, and evidently of the period of the Passion, were found in a crypt underground, and there the faithful Christian pilgrim may feel with truth that he is gazing on the traces of His Saviour's Precious Blood. Various excavations brought about other discoveries : several large cisterns of the time of Solomon, a Hebrew tunnel in perfect preservation, a never-failing spring of fresh water, and also the gate of one of the towers of the ancient fortress and parts of the outer walls, etc.

These discoveries caused great excitement in the town especially among the Jews who collected in crowds with their Rabbis asking to visit the spring and take away some of the water.

The Sanctuary, that visible response to Father Marie's ardent hopes and prayers, was solemnly inaugurated by Mgr. Bracco, Patriarch of Jerusalem on the Feast of the Compassion April 3rd, 1868, and under its shadow many different works grew and prospered. An orphanage was opened, a *Neophytat*,

a Dispensary, also a Boarding-school, and a Mahomedan school, which were attended by more than two hundred children of all religions and rites. Some of these are strengthened in the true Faith, others safeguarded against the perils which lie in wait for childhood in the East and armed for the hard battle of life, while all alike benefit by the sound moral training and intelligent education which gradually turns the pure light of the Gospel upon these benighted countries, and reveals to them the beauties of domestic virtues.

In the month of June, 1860, the Druses, encouraged by the Turks, massacred the Christians of Damascus and other parts of Syria, under circumstances of peculiar horror. Thousands of Catholics were martyred, others disappeared, and countless children roamed forsaken along the roads dying of hunger, and exposed to every kind of danger. Being anxious to rescue the orphan children from Lebanon and make a permanent home for them Father Marie sought for some suitable spot on which to build a house for this especial purpose, and found what he required at *St. Jean in Montana*. This little village, called by the Arabs Aïn Karim, and situated about five miles from the Holy City, is the birthplace of St. John the Baptist, and a church served by the Franciscans stands on the site of the house of Zachary and Elizabeth.

Facing the village another steeple marks the little Chapel of the Visitation; according to tradition this was the place where the mother of the Precursor received the visit of Mary, and the *Magnificat* was

heard for the first time on earth. Nothing could be more peaceful and charming in every sense than the scenery of this district. Father Marie began by renting a small house to which the Nuns and children from the Convent in Jerusalem could come for change of air, and to recover from attacks of the fever so prevalent in Palestine.

One day as Father Marie was scanning the horizon from the terrace of his temporary dwelling a magnificent rainbow appeared in the sky as if in mute answer to the question he had asked of his Heavenly Mother as to the site of the proposed orphanage. The rainbow ended on the high tableland of a hill which slopes downwards towards the Valley of Terebinth, not far from the Chapel of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. . . . Father Marie was naturally seized with the greatest longing to acquire this site; the hostility of the half-savage Mahomedans who lived in the village was overcome, and they themselves offered several other small tracts of land near the large piece making twenty-four acres in all.

The first stone of the orphanage was laid on July 2nd, 1863, and the building was ready for occupation by May 1st, 1865. Father Marie was always particularly fond of this delightful solitude, which had now become an annexe, so to speak, of the Convent in Jerusalem. He would have liked to make St. John's the principal orphanage of the Holy Land so as to rescue as many children as possible from the thralldom of schism and error. Every year he went

there for his Retreat before January 20th, and he was always present at the processions that took place in the month of May.

Pilgrims who visit this "Sion among the mountains" can form some idea of Father Marie's evangelical poverty by going over the little house he lived in. The tiny building, not more than twelve feet high, is divided into three rooms: one where visitors were received, a second for the use of priests who were travelling, and another at the back of the house occupied by Father Marie. This room has become a kind of family shrine, where each object preserved as a treasure speaks of the absent inmate and seems to await his return.

On the stained-wood table, which is covered with an old tablecloth, are his biretta, his albums of photographs and the statue of the Blessed Virgin. A much-patched cassock, an overcoat and a stick hang on a row of pegs. On the right is his humble bed, consisting of a horsehair mattress and pillow; a dressing-table, two chairs, and an armchair complete the furniture of the room.

Ever since Father Marie had found the hand of a little Jew boy thrust into his to seek protection on the Good Friday of 1858, he had been turning over in his mind the project of completing his life-work by starting an establishment for little boys on the same lines as the existing one for girls. The boys' school was opened on September 8th, 1874. Some fifteen small Arabs, five helpers, and the house-servants formed the

nucleus of the little family which gathered that day round the feet of *Notre Dame de Sion*. "After Mass," writes Father Marie, "the boys sang a hymn of their own composition with deafening enthusiasm! . . . This new venture," he goes on to say, "like a frail boat about to leave the harbour and put out to sea, is launched in faith and hope, and its crew of little Arab boys have expressed their satisfaction by singing lustily with their elders: *Duc in altum!* ('Launch out now into the deep'). May the Star of the Sea guide us always."

Gradually the number of boys increased but the Father was more grieved at having to say "There is no more room" to the three hundred who continued to ask admittance than pleased at having fifty children already with him. "It breaks my heart," he says. "I have no funds; if I only had funds I could soon find room. When I go through the streets of Jerusalem they threaten to stone me. Each one believes that there must be room, just a tiny place for his child; and as for funds, these good people do not give such a thing a thought! . . . Father Ratisbonne has only to plunge his hands into his barrels of gold, and his cellars are full of such barrels!"

No one in the place had an idea of the heartrending appeals Father Marie so often made to his friends in Europe and which never wholly ceased until his death.

For five years the very cramped premises of the school continued to shelter the first children admitted but Father Marie who was anxious to make the estab-

lishment stable and permanent was always seeking for a site large enough to build upon. He found what he required in 1876, in the western quarter of the Holy City, about twenty minutes from the gate of Jaffa. "It seems providential that we should be in treaty for this piece of land, for its associations are very dear to us. Tradition says that on this spot the Prophet Isaias announced to the world the great miracle of Heaven and earth: *Ecce Virgo concipiet et pariet filium*. . . . I have therefore every hope that Our Lady and Her Divine Son will bless the work I have to accomplish on this sacred spot." In order to build, money and plans were needed. Monsieur Daumet was again called upon to make a design, and the money was asked and obtained from charitable Christian benefactors. The central building was finished in 1879, and later on two side-wings were added which good Father Marie did not live to see. From the top-most terrace of the School of *St. Pierre de Sion* (as the foundation is called) a splendid panorama is to be seen. "The principal façade faces the Gate of Jaffa, the Towers of the Citadel of David, and the Armenian establishments of Mount Sion. On the left," writes Father Marie, "there is the Convent of the Prussian Deaconesses, and further on large Russian buildings, while on the right is a new quarter consisting almost entirely of Jewish dwellings. . . . Our position is extremely advantageous, we overlook the whole country round; the horizon reaches to the Dead Sea; we are in sight of the Jordan and the Moun-

tains of Moab, while the roads leading to Samaria, Jericho, Jaffa, Bethlehem, and *St. Jean in Montana*, wind along beneath our eyes. It is a beautiful view." It will easily be understood that although Father Marie opened his doors to Arab orphans he naturally preferred taking Israelites. He loved them best, and would have liked, following Our Saviour's example, to take them all under his wing and give them, over and above their technical and moral training, the means of finding out the true Faith. He did succeed in doing this in a certain number of cases, and this part of his work has been received by the Fathers of *Notre Dame de Sion* who came after him as his most precious bequest.

St. Peter's Institute, which the Fathers have continued to develop according to the Founder's ideas, is a School of Arts and Crafts, and the boys spend the greater part of their time in manual labour.

There are four workrooms into which they are sent, according to their aptitudes and preferences, to learn carpentry, carving, shoe-making and tailoring, the object being to give them a taste for work and the means of earning an honest livelihood. To keep abreast of modern requirements, the study of French and Arabic has been made more comprehensive, and in Palestine and Europe and other parts of the world it is not unusual to meet with former pupils of St. Peter's proud of having been brought up there. Most of these have remained in the humbler walks of life, but some, thanks to the education they have received

and the principles instilled into them, have risen in the social scale, or have been called by Divine Providence to become priests and Religious.

When Father Marie was asked how he could ever have accomplished so much, he would answer : "I cannot tell you, I have never thought about it ; the Blessed Virgin undertook to provide for everything," and the Missionary would pass over in silence all that he himself had gone through. Never a word was heard of the tremendous efforts, the unceasing collections, the fatigue and illness which more than once brought him to death's door, the long journeys to every part of Europe undertaken in all seasons, and the incessant labour of an overwhelming correspondence. Sometimes kind and devoted friends gave him hospitality and lightened his burdens, as in Belgium and Marseilles, where he made the most precious friendships, which were an assistance to him in the developing and furthering of his work. Then he would say : "All is going well. Mary our Mother is more than ever Queen of Sion and our most tender Mother." At other times when his journeys and efforts seemed useless, when exposed to calumny and humiliation, ill and exhausted, he would have liked to rest, and felt, as he said, "the need of the *Requiem Æternum*," he heard a voice continually urging him on, and saying : "Forward, forward !"

"What will your address be ?" he was asked when about to start on one of his journeys. "In the train," he answered gravely. Sometimes he would be a guest

in a château, sometimes in a humble village presbytery; he would be greeted with every attention and kindness in some places, and in others be obliged to sleep all night on a chair, but he was always glad when he had to suffer something for his beloved Mission. As Father Théodore said, he "would willingly be cut in pieces for the sake of Sion."

Father Marie made a point of publishing and circulating the result of his journeyings by means of periodical reports of great interest and charm, which under the name of *Annales de la Mission de Notre Dame de Sion en Terre Sainte* revived the zeal and enlisted the sympathies of the various committees established in different countries to support the work. He and Father Théodore jointly drew up a touching appeal to the "Christian Mothers," whose confraternities he wished to see amalgamated with his Mission of civilisation and conversion. This was the origin of what was known later as *L'Adoption Maternelle*. In a circular addressed to the "Mothers," they were asked to succour with maternal charity the hundreds of orphans who were stretching out imploring hands to them, and for whom our Lord Himself was pleading; whilst the children, the objects of this charity, were constantly reminded of their obligation to pray for their "Mothers."

In the beginning of 1878 Father Marie revisited Rome where he had not been since 1842, and on January 20th he entered *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte* with feelings of deep emotion. The church was full of

people and still decorated for the solemn yearly commemoration of the Miracle; the anniversary festivities were just over, and the devotion of the "Forty Hours" was in progress. After spending some time on the spot where thirty-six years before Baron de Bussierre had found Alphonse Ratisbonne absorbed in prayer, he knelt before the High Altar where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed and went on into the Sacristy. "Would it be possible," he said to one of the monks, "for me to say Mass at 7.30 to-morrow?" "Yes, certainly." "Thank you." "Would you like to celebrate at the altar of the *Ratisbonne Madonna*?" "Yes, I should indeed like to say Mass at that altar." "But where are you from? What Mission do you belong to?" "The Jerusalem Mission." "Then you know Ratisbonne?" "Certainly, I know him well; in fact, I shall offer my Mass for him." "*Va bene!*"

In spite of his weaknesses and sufferings Pius IX. insisted on receiving the convert Jew who had become the apostle of his brethren. The audience took place on February 1st, 1878, six days before the death of the saintly Pontiff who fervently blessed Father Marie, the Congregation of *Notre Dame de Sion*, and all the works connected with it, inquiring into every detail with fatherly interest. On this same date in the year 1842 the Missionary had been received by Gregory XVI., and the blessings invoked on him then had been fulfilled abundantly. The Pope seemed apparently to connect the two occasions, for he gave him a painting on ivory representing Mary, the

Child Jesus, and St. John the Baptist, saying: "Gregory XVI. gave you a crucifix, Pius IX. gives you the Blessed Virgin."

"I longed to thank the Mother and Queen of Sion," wrote Father Marie, "and that is why I spent the day in blissful seclusion at *Sant' Andrea*. I found I could not say any vocal prayers. . . . I began the 'Memorare' over and over again. With beating heart and with tears, I thought first of one friend and then of another, asking, hoping, and at times utterly overpowered by my emotion. I like to think that in the midst of the joys of Heaven we shall be better able to express our feelings. It is too humbling!"

Father Marie's chief characteristic was his spirit of faith, and this gave to his character its real beauty and greatness, and it was this faith which for more than forty years sustained him in his hard and strenuous life as a missionary. Faith gave him the true insight into the mystery of suffering, and excited in him an ardent desire to become always more like to his thorn-crowned Saviour, of whose sufferings the sanctuary of the *Ecce Homo* was a perpetual reminder.

Father Marie's naturally cheerful disposition, and his conversation, may have given an erroneous impression of him to superficial observers, but his intimate friends knew how his whole soul was absorbed in the thought of His Saviour crucified, abandoned and covered with shame. Father Marie's unceasing journeys and the inevitable obstacles and hindrances he encountered, afforded him ample opportunities of

suffering and humiliation, and when he preached on the Passion his hearers felt his words were those of a priest who had drunk deeply of Our Lord's chalice. That bitter Cup had given him courage, and he helped others to be brave by assuring them that "there was only one step from Calvary to Heaven." This faith made him most scrupulous in his dealings with all funds collected for charity, knowing that they were made up largely from the pence of the poor he insisted on them being used in a spirit of poverty—that is to say, by avoiding all unnecessary outlay.

It was his faith which kept him genuinely humble and made him prefer the company of the poor and outcast to the society of the great. If his ardent temperament sometimes carried him further than he intended when he had to administer correction, he at once humbled himself and acknowledged it. He was quite content that others should think as little of him as he did of himself, and was in the habit of bending his head whenever the invocation *Refugium Peccatorum, Ora pro nobis* occurred in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. The mere name of the Mother of Grace moved him deeply. He had made that name his shield and his buckler and would hardly admit that he himself had any other. "The name of Alphonse was not given to me in Baptism," he would say, when receiving birthday congratulations. "There was only one name I could possibly take on January 31st, 1842—the name of Marie."¹

¹ Letter of August 10th, 1879, to Mother Louise Weywada.

When he spoke of his Heavenly Mother, his love seemed too great for human expression. His tongue would falter, and his eyes would look as if still dazzled by those beams of light which had streamed on him from Her immaculate hands, forcing him three times to bend his gaze to earth. Silence, unless when to speak was a duty, seemed the best eloquence. The Miraculous Medal which had played so great a part in his conversion was his dearest possession, and once when he had lost it his affliction was as great as if the Mother of Mercy herself had forsaken him; he could do nothing until it was found. Mary was his comfort in every trial, and his greatest source of hope. "I have never failed to see the intervention of Mary in all that has happened to me," he wrote. "She herself is the hand of God; not the hand which chastises but the one which pours out mercies, and that is why I have never ceased to hope even at the worst of times."¹

Ever calm and full of courage in adversity, he revealed the secret of his strength in this profession of faith: "I believe in the Resurrection, in Divine Mercy, in the love of Mary, and in life everlasting."

¹ Letter to Mother Marie Laure Grenier.

CHAPTER XVII

LAST YEARS (1873—1881)

THE privations of the war of 1870 had seriously affected Father Théodore Ratisbonne's health, and when he began again his work of preaching he was so enfeebled that a rest was absolutely necessary. He resigned himself to a cure at Cauterets, but without finding the perfect quiet he required.

"My season at Cauterets," he wrote a few days after his arrival, "has turned into a Mission. Whenever I am not carrying out the doctor's prescriptions there are people calling upon me. I am to preach on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, and I have also been asked to preach a Charity Sermon and to address a meeting of Christian Mothers."¹

He never refused services of this kind and two hours daily he spent in the Confessional. On his way back he stopped at Lourdes where he said Mass and preached three times in the same day. Although continuing his work he was beginning to realise that his strength was failing, after nearly fifty years spent in the service of God and his fellow-men. "My sight is

¹ Letter of July 8th, 1873.

going," he wrote to one of his Daughters about this time, "and I am becoming like a last year's leafless tree, but the more the sap dries up within the trunk the more I love and cherish the children whom God has confided to my care. In my withered frame my heart is by no means dead, on the contrary, it is more living than ever, and my love for my children greater, if possible, than it was before."¹

The last Retreats Father Théodore gave outside the Convent of Sion were at the *Légion d'Honneur* at St. Denis, at *St. Thomas d'Aquin* (for the Association of Nocturnal Adoration), and at the Convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary. He had always gladly consented to preach for religious Communities, and the Benedictine Nuns of the Temple, the Sisters of *L'Abbaye aux Bois*, the Religious of the Sacred Heart at Amiens, and the Carmelites, had more particularly, perhaps, his priestly sympathies.

His own annual Retreat was made either at *St. Sulpice* or in some Religious House, such as the Trappists' of the *Port du Salut*, the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of *Betharram*, or at *Clamart*, where the Society of Jesus gave the Exercises of St. Ignatius. He wrote from this last place in 1875: "If you would like to know the subject of my Meditations I will tell you. I am meditating on the questions which Our Lord thrice asked of St. Peter: *Peter, lovest thou Me?* Then I repeat the three answers of St. Peter, and dwell on

¹ Letter of September 22nd to Mother Jean Baptiste Lagarmitte.

the conclusion: *Pasce agnos meos* ('Feed My lambs')."¹

The faithful servant of God was soon to have other food for prayer and meditation, for his Lord was about to show him the painful road that would have to be trodden on the way to the grave, and was about to say to him :

"When thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and lead thee . . ." (John xxi. 18).

On Ash Wednesday he distributed the Ashes to the Sisters and pupils of the Mother-House, and was preparing to preach the whole Lenten course, but God willed otherwise. On the evening of March 6th the good Father sat up very late writing letters to catch the Eastern Mail. On the afternoon of the following day he was detained a long time in the Confessional of his Chapel which was very cold, and on returning to his room he bent down to pick up a letter which had fallen near his writing-table. As he stooped he felt himself slipping and could not stop his fall; his left leg and arm were both paralysed. When Father Courtade came in he found him lying on the ground unable to speak clearly but perfectly conscious. His face wore a peaceful smile as he was lifted up. It was a mild stroke, of the kind which doctors say is not

¹ Letter of August 18th to the Sion Nuns of Paris and Grandbourg.

fatal to life. This opinion, and the solace of praying to God for the sufferer, were the only rays of hope which came to the many at home and abroad who were full of anxiety and consternation at the news. But the ways of God are merciful, and it was not surprising that the Divine Master should call His faithful disciple aside and bid him rest awhile. Father Ratisbonne had hitherto parcelled out the hours of his daily life on a twofold principle. He believed, firstly, that "we have no right to devote to our own comfort the time which belongs to Our Lord"; and secondly that "when we are doing His work, we should give all the time necessary to things in general and also to each separate thing in particular."

He began his day at 5 a.m., prayer, office, and preparation for Mass occupying him till 7 o'clock. For twenty years he said Mass daily in the Chapel of the Mother-House and often preached before offering the Holy Sacrifice. The first Mothers as well as all who followed them say that his whole bearing at such times was that of a Saint. After his Mass he made a long thanksgiving, "drinking in love at its Source," to use his own words, and rose up refreshed and strengthened, and longing to pour into the souls of others some of the graces he had just received.

As a rule he would next go to the Noviciate to give an instruction, or else to preside over some important meeting of the Central Council, after which he would return to his own room where a voluminous correspondence awaited him, and a number of persons were

expecting to see and consult him. These included fervent Catholics, men of the world, Protestants and Israelites, priests and monks. They all had recourse to his advice: anti-Christian prejudice vanished at the sight of him so great was the veneration his person and character inspired.

The afternoons he devoted principally to various social obligations and visits of charity, especially to the sick and to those in trouble. Few have known better than he how "from God to come down to all, and from all to rise to God."

On Thursday evenings he presided over the assembly of Nuns in the Mother-House, and Saturday afternoons the meetings of the Lady-Associates of Sion, besides keeping half an hour free for his beloved children of the *Neophytai*, so long as they continued to live there.

Until his illness the Children of Mary of the school were also under his direction. Sometimes when he happened to be present during recreation in the garden, he would walk towards the pupils led by one of their mistresses. Surrounded by the little ones and followed by the elder girls he would lead them all to his favourite spot, where stood the statue of Our Lady Immaculate. "He would repeat the Angelical Salutation with us," says one of them, "and if he had time would speak to us of the virtues of Mary. We all crowded round to listen, and the words of the gentle and venerable priest still re-echo in our hearts to-day. He loved Mary and he made

us love her too. "I wish all my children to be like her, he would say with a searching glance at us all to see if anyone failed to respond to this paternal aspiration. . . . He was so holy and so simple that he had no idea of his own worth," continues the same writer. "Intelligence was written on his broad brow, gentleness, charity and nobility of thought in his eyes, and the decision of his character was revealed by the firm lines about his mouth. He always wore a big cloak, and his aureole of white hair made a great impression on our imagination, and we believed that all the saints must have looked like good Father Ratisbonne. But his holiness was not a matter of intellect, nor did we identify it with his dignified exterior; we felt it came from the heart, for he had the heart of the true Priest, and was compassionate for all sorrows. Happy those who knew, loved and revered him, and on whose forehead his hand traced the indelible sign of the Cross."¹

He joined the Fathers of his Community before supper for spiritual reading, and after recreation night prayers were said in common, though Father Ratisbonne did not retire to rest even then. When we add to the list of his daily occupations Baptisms, Abjurations, Clothings, Professions, Canonical Examinations, Retreats, First Communions, Enrolments of Children of Mary, bi-monthly meetings of "Christian Mothers," Committee Meetings,² etc., we shall readily understand

¹ Report of the Children of Mary (*persévérantes*), May 21st, 1900.

² The Oriental Schools Committee and the Committee of Education at Archbishop's House.

that little time was left for answering the letters "which lay piled upon his writing-table like a snow-drift."

So he devoted part of the night to his correspondence, and it was only after answering his letters, saying his Office, and refreshing himself with one last visit to the Blessed Sacrament, that he lay down to rest.

The illness which so suddenly laid him low naturally brought about great changes in the routine of his daily life. Completely resigned to the Will of God, he was less concerned with his own sufferings than at the thought of the grief of his spiritual children, and he wished them all, especially those at a distance, to be reassured as quickly as possible. A week after the stroke, he had recovered sufficient power on his left side to walk a few steps, and he at once dictated the following message to them: "I was between life and death, but I am now on my way to recovery," and he was so touched by the joy with which this consoling news was received by all the Convents of the Congregation that he was apt to say that he "had never before been of so much use in arousing devotion and fervour throughout his large family."

When Father Marie received the news of his brother's danger, his first thought was to go to Paris. But he was obliged to defer his journey and wrote to his brother instead. "Every morning," he said, "until you can say Mass again, your unworthy brother will celebrate in your place, in your name, and

for your particular intention, either in the *Ecce Homo* Chapel of Expiation, at *Notre Dame de Sion in Montana*, or at *St. Pierre*. You may dispose of my Mass, my hands, and even of my heart . . . and I shall continue to do this until you yourself tell me to stop.”¹

On September 8th, after being deprived for eight months of the privilege of offering the Holy Sacrifice, Father Théodore was able to say a Mass of thanksgiving, “the mere idea of which,” he says, “recalls all the impressions of the first Mass I ever celebrated.”

He had been at Grandbourg since June; his time there was not so taken up by visitors as in Paris, and his close union with God was more undisturbed. “Nature at Grandbourg,” he often said, “is like an altar dressed with green boughs . . . the paths in the park seem made for meditation and prayer. . . . Every tree preaches a sermon, and every blade of grass proclaims the wonderful work of the Creator.”

Often after spending some time looking at the beautiful sunny landscape he would ask to be led into one or other of the classrooms where the first distant glimpses of his venerable figure caused a thrill of joy. Then he would return to the Chaplain’s quarters and open his correspondence in which roses were not unmixed with thorns. Sectarian animosity still continued to make itself felt by insulting anonymous letters. One day, when he had finished reading one of these cowardly attacks, he handed it in silence to

¹ Letter of June 19th, 1876.

a person present at the time, after which he tore it up, saying quietly: "I often receive similar ones."

He dictated most of his letters but a great many answers are in his own hand, and were written at the cost of great patience and ingenuity. Nothing was too much for him when some good deed was to be done, or some kind thing to be said. Later on he substituted little pictures on which he wrote a word or two that brought peace and light to the recipient. Every soul in touch with his received to the very end the spiritual assistance necessary to individual needs and corresponding to the trust placed in him.

Father Marie did not arrive in Paris until October, 1877, to find the venerable Founder just recovering from an attack of pneumonia which had brought him to death's door. "He is a mere shadow," wrote the Missionary in the first emotion of meeting, "but his heart seems bigger and more spiritual than ever. God is evidently sending him these trials to give him the opportunity of becoming a great saint."¹

Father Marie spent ten months with his brother, interspersed with repeated tours to collect funds for his work in the Holy Land. Everyone expected him to remain for the Third General Chapter to be held in August. "How can I bring myself to leave our Father?" he said, but the question was already answered in his own mind. On the morning of July 4th, after saying Mass, he left Grandbourg as if for a short absence. Father Théodore was coming out

¹ Letter of October 14th to Mother Louise Weywada.

of the Sacristy on his way to the Altar when he beheld his brother for the last time on earth. "Prepare our Father gently for the news of my departure," wrote the traveller three days later; "I do not think he cares for the agonising wrench of saying farewell any more than I do myself."

"I knew Father Marie would go without bidding me good-bye," was all the good Father said, "but I did not think he would leave so soon. I can but admire the courage with which he obeys the promptings of Grace."

On the Feast of the Assumption in 1878 the Founder was still able to preside at the Sessions of the General Chapter at the Mother-House. After the crisis which had so nearly taken him from his spiritual family it was an occasion of great emotion on both sides. "I must control myself," he said to his Daughters, "in order to speak to you as calmly as God wills. How grateful we should be to Him for allowing us to meet again! And what a proof it is of His love and favour! He has preserved you all and brought me back from the gates of death! Our life, of course, is in His hands, but still I believe His intention is to prolong mine a little longer."

He wished to spend whatever time God would still give him on earth in developing and strengthening the spirit peculiar to the Congregation. The conversion of Israel still remained in his mind as the objective to which everything else should tend, as the reason and final aim of all the works that had been accom-

plished during his lifetime. Father Théodore's illness had been the signal for a reconciliation with his Jewish friends and relations, even among those who did not sympathise with his views. Almost unconsciously they had yielded to the influence of the priest, as such, and his wonderful kindness had done the rest. In less than two years he had baptised eight members of his family. These were the younger generation and were brought to the very door of the Church by their forbears, who, alas ! did not contemplate following them in.

"The grace of God is not exhausted," wrote the venerable Founder to a former convert. "The Catholic Faith has penetrated into several of the great Jewish families. But we do not care to speak about these conversions: in due time they will be made known. We must do good in silence and not try to see the result of our work. It is no small encouragement to look at the numerous vocations that have come to us, and the increase in the number of our Houses."¹

In view of the harvest he confidently believed would come in God's own time, he had just published, on the advice of his priests and certain other friends, a book entitled "*Réponses aux questions d'un Israélite de notre temps*" ("Answers to the Objections of a Modern Jew").² In 1874 he brought out a volume called "*Rayons de vérité*" ("Gleams of Truth"), and in

¹ Letter of November 24th to Mother Barnabé Benedick.

² Translated into English and published by the Catholic Truth Society.

addition to these a tenth edition of his "Histoire de St. Bernard."

Two years later he revised a collection of subjects of prayer: "Miettes Evangéliques" ("Daily Meditations from the Gospel"), and wrote his "Meditations sur la vie présente et future" ("Meditations on this world and the next"). About the same time also he published his "Trois Retraites destinées aux Religieuses" ("Three Retreats for Nuns"), besides a great number of "Lettres Circulaires" (general letters to the Congregation). He could not possibly have accomplished so much in his old age, with the additional drawback of his paralysis, without the aid of an able amanuensis who would help him in his work with all the filial devotion of a daughter. This help, he tells us, he found in Mother Benedicta de Ligondès, whose elevation of mind and keen intelligence afforded him all the assistance he required.

She had been at Grandbourg ever since 1857, even before her profession, and had been successively class-mistress, Mistress-General of the school, Assistant, and finally Superior, as well as member of the Central Council from 1865 onwards. It was in this calm and beautiful retreat of Grandbourg that Father Théodore spent many long hours of work, dictating his "Souvenirs," and preparing, jointly with Mother Benedicta, what he called the "Spiritual Food" of Sion. This beloved daughter grew to understand more of his inmost thoughts and feelings than anyone else; perhaps he foresaw that Providence was preparing her

for a special mission, that of making known to future generations the Congregation of Sion and its Founders.¹

While occupied in this way Father Théodore was the recipient of an honour he had neither sought nor desired. Monsignor Graselli in reporting to the Sovereign Pontiff on his work as Vicar-Apostolic of Constantinople, and of his other labours in the Holy Land, spoke of the Convents of Sion, of which he had seen much, and also of the Founder. A few days later Father Ratisbonne received a Brief from Rome dated May 7th, 1880, notifying his appointment as Protonotary-Apostolic. The announcement of this honour gratified Father Ratisbonne's daughters as much as it surprised himself. Faithful to the early teaching of Mademoiselle Humann he had always been carefully on his guard against titles or distinctions coming from any source, so much so that in the early days of the Congregation of the Fathers of Sion he had seriously thought of giving up his decoration of the Order of St. Gregory.

"You wish honours for me, like the Mother of the Sons of Zebedee," he wrote to one of his Daughters,² "but Our Lord says rather: "Can you drink of My chalice?" Honours are not necessary for doing good work. When I entered the service of Jesus Christ I asked Him to leave me always in the lowest ranks of

¹ To Mother Benedicta we owe the "*Vie du Rev. Père Marie Théodore Ratisbonne*" (2 vols. Poussieltgue, 1903).

² Letter to Mother Alphonsine, July 28th, 1863.

His servants, and He granted my prayer. But this has not prevented my becoming your Father and the Father of Sion."

In the present instance, however, he could but offer his sincerest gratitude to Pope Leo XIII.

"The Apostolic Brief," he said in his letter of June 14th, "imposes on me the happy obligation of promising fidelity to the Sovereign Pontiff, and it is with my whole heart that I fulfil this duty, in which, thanks be to God, I have never failed since I had the happiness of receiving Holy Orders."

When he was obligated to wear the emblems of his new dignity he did so with that true modesty which always accompanies great virtue and strong character. Cardinal de Bonnechose writing three months later to Father Théodore complains affectionately of the new honour being kept secret. "My dear Monsignor," he says, "I had no idea that our Holy Father the Pope had conferred this touching mark of esteem and kindness upon you. . . . You must have long known that nothing which concerns you can be a matter of indifference to me. . . . My best congratulations, my dear Théodore. . . ."

This distinction which the Cardinal described in the same letter as "well merited," was an honour to the whole Congregation, but in all their relations with the Founder his Daughters still continued to call him "Father," their favourite name for him.

It was in 1880 that the Pastor of Sion was thus honoured, and during the same year the iniquitous

Decrees of March 29th against the Religious Orders were promulgated. The priests of *Notre Dame de Sion* did not escape; though a very small community, they were considered of too much importance, and as such were the objects of implacable hatred. The newspaper *L'Événement* had published a statement in 1879 to the effect that Father Ratisbonne had at his command a congregation of fifty thousand men! The Founder did not feel the effect of the Decrees until the 5th of November following. "A strong force was sent to surprise us early in the morning," he wrote afterwards. "It was still dark when our usually peaceful *Rue Duguay-Trouin* was surrounded and invaded by a regiment of police, headed by Commissioners and followed by two companies of firemen. It was quite a miniature army, equipped with weapons and lanterns, and even a Judas was not lacking to complete the parallel. I was in my room preparing to say Mass, when the Commissioners with some half-dozen agents came in without knocking. I received them quite calmly. Besides myself, only Father Courtade, Father de Cormis, and Father Alphonse were in the House. These three priests at once gathered round me. We were all perfectly calm. The poor agents seemed quite embarrassed to know how to begin their work. I began by asking them if they were Jews or Protestants, to which they shamefacedly replied that they were Catholics. 'So you are Catholics! In that case you must know what sentence the Church pronounces on those who molest the ministers of Jesus

Christ. It is painful for me to have to remind you of these penalties for I am sorry for you.'

"The Commissioners were in a hurry to have done. They consented to my remaining in the house alone with my servant, but gave my colleagues to understand that they must leave at once, which they did, after protesting against such arbitrary procedure."¹

In their confusion the agents had not noticed the entrance to the Chapel where the seals not having been affixed several persons were assembled for Mass. Father Théodore soon appeared: "I am going to offer a Mass of Thanksgiving," he said, turning to the Faithful. "Let us thank the Blessed Virgin, she has obtained for us the honour of persecution and the consolation of being still allowed to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice here. We will now pray for the poor agents who, much against their will have driven us from a house which belongs to us. You know, my brethren, that many persecutors have been converted and have become Saints."²

The servant of God spent in the deepest retirement the two months which had still to elapse before the Jubilee of his priesthood. It was hoped that some of his first Daughters, now scattered, would be able to be present at this solemnity, but the troubled state of affairs prevented this hope from being realised. Father Marie had provided from his distant home the Elements for the Holy Sacrifice, altar-breads made

¹ Circular of November 6th, 1880.

² Deposition of eyewitnesses.

from ears of corn grown in Bethlehem, and wine made at *St. Jean in Montana*. There were numbers of ecclesiastics in the Sanctuary of *Notre Dame de Sion* on the morning of January 6th, 1881. The Chapel was beautifully decorated and illuminated, and to the sounds of the organ inaugurated for the occasion the venerable Jubilarian wearing a magnificent chasuble entered the Chapel between Father Courtade and Father Dupuis. When he reached the Altar he was too overcome to finish the *Confiteor*, and the three priests were silent for several moments.

"My dearest Lord," said the good Father addressing his beloved Master in tones of gentle complaint, "I asked for fire and You have given me tears!"

After the Gospel the Abbé Cognat, *curé* of *Notre Dame des Champs*, preached a simple but eloquent sermon on the priesthood.

Father Théodore had dreaded hearing himself praised, but while respecting this humility the orator found means of making tactful allusions to the life-work of the Jubilarian.

Afterwards some of the Father's devoted friends assembled in one of the parlours. Priests of the Society of Monsieur Bautain, of St. Sulpice, of the Society of Jesus, and of the Oratory (in the person of Father Pététot), were present, and Achille Ratisbonne, sole surviving Israelite brother of Father Théodore, took his place among them. The Abbé Humbourg, formerly a pupil of Father Ratisbonne at the *Petit Séminaire* of Strasburg, read a poem composed by himself for the

occasion. But among the countless congratulations which rejoiced the family of Sion none was more appreciated than the telegram from Rome sent by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Jacobini, in the name of the Sovereign Pontiff, pronouncing a blessing on the Founder and the whole Congregation. Father Théodore returned thanks through His Eminence, in a letter full of joy and gratitude.

"We all with one heart," he writes, "offer our supplications and thanksgivings to God for our beloved Leo XIII. and the whole Church. We pray, we entreat, and we give thanks, because our hope rests on the word of God which bids us be ready for trials as well as for triumphs."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END (1881—1884)

THE rejoicings on the fiftieth anniversary of Father Théodore's first Mass seemed to cast a halo round the venerable patriarch who had glorified God by his life-work, and was now himself receiving glory from the great things he had achieved.

On looking back over his career we ask ourselves: What was the secret of his energy? His vivid faith seemed to give him a foretaste of the peace of God. He saw and loved God in everything; he read his Creator's name and the beauty of His handiwork in the spacious heavens, in distant horizons, in the tints of each flower, and the song of every bird. He never passed by a vineyard without a loving commentary on the text: *I am the vine, you are the branches*. The Holy Scriptures, and especially the Gospel, were his favourite nourishment for both heart and mind. "This is God's own book," he said to a Nun, "and it is His Spirit and not our own which must guide us while we read. Learn from this Book how to love, for the sacred teachings have but one aim, which is to make us understand how much God loves us and how much we should love Him."

Each morning at the Altar his soul was inflamed by

contact with the Divine Word, and during the day his contemplation was only interrupted in order to tell all God's creatures that "if He has made the capacity of men's hearts so great it is only that they may love Him Who is Love itself."

A man so permeated with the mind of Jesus Christ was not likely to separate brotherly love from Divine charity. "Love of our neighbour," he said, "is not different in essence from love of God. These two virtues flow like two streams from the same source, one rises towards God and the other is poured out over man, His image. When one of these streams runs dry the other is exhausted; their levels exactly correspond." "Charity," he said to his Daughters, "is the never-changing text of all Our Lord's teaching. So do not be surprised if I echo it, and do not allow yourselves to grow tired of hearing it."

"O dear and revered Father," exclaimed a Priest¹ when speaking of Father Ratisbonne, whom he had come to know towards the end of his life: "What words can express your tenderness and tactful kindness? You could love as few are able or are called upon to do. The God of love and charity had specially gifted you in this sense. In your company one forgot the man and was conscious only of God and of a soul filled with His Divine Presence."

"His soul," says another,² "was pure as that of a child; beneath the venerable exterior we knew so well, and despite the weight of years, he kept to the last the

¹ Rev. Father Dorgues, S.J.

² Mgr. Doublet.

innocence of childhood, combined with the prudence of the priest."

Though Father Théodore was the son of a rich banker yet he had more than once experienced the hard pinch of poverty and earned his bread by work which was often beyond his strength. "My earthly possessions," he explained with a smile, "were divided into four parts : the first was kept back from me by my father, the second my uncle refused to pay, I was defrauded of the third by a lawyer, and the fourth I myself distributed among the poor."

Simple as a child, detached from the things of this world, he possessed that true humility which, in his own words, "moderates joy as well as grief." He seems to have described himself when he said : "Our intentions and actions, our wishes and our thoughts, should always find their centre in the Divine Will, and if we are faithful to this holy practice to the last day of our life we shall be able to say with confidence when death comes : 'I have done always that which is agreeable to my Father.'"

In order that he might not miss one last point of resemblance to his Divine Master the disciple had to pass through and drink of the waters of Kedron, and feel the agony of Gethsemane. For nearly a year after his Golden Jubilee he went through those hours of anguish, "when Our Lord withdraws the sensible effect of His presence and leaves the soul a prey to fears, privations, and the bitterest desolation"—hours of purgatory before its time, during which the soul, as

St. Teresa says, asks itself in the excess of its sadness and despair "Where is now thy God?" Father Théodore's one fear at such times was that he might lose confidence and thus fall short of what he had so constantly urged on others. He had recourse to Mary, the Dispenser of Graces. "This Divine Mother has pity on our weakness and the tottering fabric of our poor human nature. No doubt she will not spare us all contact with the Cross, but she will be near her suffering children and lighten their sufferings. . . . Like the Church, she casts a gleam of joy (*Lætare*) on the dark and penitential days."

At last the good Father could breathe a sigh of relief: "Our Lord would not leave me for ever in that dark tunnel; He supported me by increasing my patience and trust. I turned to the most loving Heart of Jesus, and in that Heart I found my own once more." He felt that his "recovered" heart was all the stronger for the ordeal. Providence permitted this so that the good Father might make the most of the two years which he was still to spend on earth. Detached from self and weaned from even the consolations of his God, he had now only to break the last ties which bound him to what he had loved best on earth. His first sacrifice was having to forsake the home of twenty-nine years. He left it on November 21st, 1881, to take up his abode in a humble apartment (75 *Rue Notre Dame des Champs*) near the Mother-House. Henceforward he would not have the consolation of the Sacramental Presence of Our Lord in the tiny Oratory prepared for

him, and he writes : "I have always thought of myself as living in temporary quarters, like a traveller who is only passing through this world. The final installation will not take place until we reach the Heavenly Sion where we have an abiding city."¹

And now death was about to strike those near and dear to him. On December 5th, 1881, Mother Emilie Lagarmitte his well-beloved Daughter *Mère selon le cœur de Dieu*, as he called her, died at Royan. "Jesus, I live for Thee; Jesus, I die for Thee; Jesus, I belong to Thee, living or dead!" were her last words.

In July, 1882, Mother Alphonsine Würmser died at Marseilles. A painful illness had been her "Altar of Sacrifice" on which the victim lay immolated with Jesus Christ, repeating: "My dear Master, Thou lovest suffering and I will love it too!"

In October Cardinal de Bonnechose was called to his rest. "He has left the Calvary of this world," wrote Father Théodore, "to ascend the throne Our Lord has prepared for him."

And last of all, on December 21st, 1883, Madame Josson de Bilhem (in religion Mother Christina) gently faded out of life, blessing God for the grace of dying a Nun and on her lips a hymn of thanksgiving: *In Sion firmata sum*.

The loss of these friends who left this world one after the other blessing and praising God, did not grieve Father Théodore with the pang of parting but rather suggested to him hopes of speedy reunion.

¹ Letter of November 13th, 1881.

Meanwhile his fatherly tenderness increased more and more towards those he was so soon to leave himself, especially his little family of priests. "The energy among them has quite revived my strength," he wrote. "On the 28th of October we expect the Abbé de Chaumontel whom I hear very well spoken of."¹ And he rejoiced greatly when the title of Apostolic Missionary was conferred by Leo XIII. on Fathers Courtade, Dupuis, de Cormis, and Ledrappier. "Death properly so-called does not exist for the soul nourished on the living Bread which came down from Heaven," he wrote. "So that we should fear death less than anything, for death is deliverance and means new birth in Heaven. . . . Only the man who fears to enter his native land need dread death."

For Father Théodore the time had come to consummate the union begun on earth. It was said of him that his earthly career could be summed up in these words—angelic peace, wonderful simplicity, and supreme solicitude for those of his friends who were still in the world, and whom he "loved to the end."

The good Father's health was well maintained to the surprise of all until December. "God was preparing His servant for the hour of conflict and leaving him the necessary strength so that his faculties might remain unimpaired to the end."²

¹ Letter of 1883 to the Grandbourg Convent.

² The following extracts are quoted from the account written by Mother Marie Paul Hibon after the death of Father Théodore.

“He was in the midst of his Daughters for the last time on the Feast of St. John. He had come to say Mass at the Mother-House and receive the first Vows of an Irish Novice. He would not be withheld from assembling the Novices after the ceremony. His heart, he said, was full, and he spoke these last words to them as a Testament of his love :

“All my life I have looked upon the Heavenly Marriage of the Spouses of Jesus Christ as one of the greatest joys of my ministry. . . . This touching solemnity has always been a consolation to me. Can anything be more beautiful than uniting a soul to Our Lord, and being the instrument of a mystic union? Only a priest can have this honour. This morning I offered you all to Our Lord praying of Him to grant you a love like that of His well-beloved disciple. . . . I like to make Him an offering of all the flowers of Sion. . . . I gather them in my hands and offer them to Him. What a thrill of joy must go through Heaven at the sight! How my heart will rejoice when I receive my children there! For we shall all meet above and be with Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and St. John! . . . You know that when St. John was at Ephesus he was as old as I am. They carried him into the assembly of the Faithful, and there being almost past speaking he just said to them: “Love one another.” He was once asked why he always repeated the same thing, and he answered, “It is enough.” Yes, it is true, it is enough! So engrave in your hearts the great precept of charity : *Little children, love one another.* But I need not

tell you to do this for you love each other already.'

"The next day, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, Father Théodore entered on his eighty-second year and offered the Holy Sacrifice for all the children of Sion. He had a slight cough during the next few days but he went on with his work, praying, writing, and even receiving visits from his family and friends. On January 1st he said Mass in his Oratory with the greatest difficulty and for the last time. His bronchial tubes were becoming very much oppressed and this was a bad symptom. . . . After three days' discomfort he was feeling very exhausted, and said to one of his Daughters: 'I am very ill and I can feel my condition is serious. If this is so you must tell me for there are things I must do. First of all I want to see Father Marie; you must write and say so, but without telling him I am ill so as not to make him anxious.'

"By the 5th the symptoms became still more alarming; Father Grandvaux of St. Sulpice, his Confessor, thought it time to bring Viaticum and Extreme Unction to the good Father as he had desired. Father Théodore was in his armchair; with great effort he managed to put on his cotta and stole. It is difficult to describe the majesty and beauty of his face at that moment. He was with difficulty restrained from kneeling when the Blessed Sacrament was brought in. His attention never wandered for a moment and he made all the responses to the prayers, and when the

ceremony was over he gave thanks and said out loud :
'I ask the same grace for all my children.'

"Father Grandvaux had just gone when Mgr. Richard, Archbishop of Larissa and Bishop-Coadjutor of Paris, who had been apprised of the good Father's condition by Cardinal Guibert, came to visit and bless him. Those who did not see these two saintly men together, their venerable faces alight with love and charity, have missed a truly heavenly spectacle. The Archbishop on rising to take his leave fervently embraced the dying priest in the Cardinal's name and left him so happy and comforted that he kept on repeating : 'How kind the Coadjutor was !'

"And when he was reminded of the affection that both the Cardinal and the Coadjutor felt for him he answered : 'All the better, they will watch over Sion in the future.'

"The night was trying : the venerable Father constantly spoke of his Mass and asked to be vested for celebration. . . . But in the morning his sufferings abated and he even spent some hours next day at his writing-table. In the midst of these fluctuations in his condition he was told one day that his Daughters were besieging Heaven for his recovery. 'The dear children,' he said, 'cannot bear the idea of my death.' Then he raised his voice, and deep with faith pronounced the words : *Non moriar sed vivam*.¹

"On January 9th he made his last Holy Communion on earth. At his own wish his Assistant read him the

¹ "I shall not die, but live."

prayers of thanksgiving in Latin, as well as Our Lord's discourse after the Last Supper from St. John's Gospel. . . . He interrupted himself fearing to tire the invalid, but the latter signed to him to continue and appeared to sink into a profound slumber when the reading was concluded.

"When he next opened his eyes he saw two of his first Daughters, Mother Marie Paul and Mother Marie Benedicta, sitting by his bed. With great effort, for speech was becoming difficult, he said to them : 'God could not have given me a greater consolation than to die surrounded by my children. You may be sure that if God admits me into the Heavenly Sion I shall always love, strengthen, console and bless you.'

"In spite of the weakness which increased throughout the day the holy priest continually asked by signs for prayers.

"He seemed very happy when Father Courtade touched his head with a little picture of Our Lady, and pronounced these words : *Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria.*

"Several times the dying priest was heard to ejaculate : *Singulariter in spe constituisti me !* and to repeat the words : *In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum !*

"He was asked in the course of his last night if he were in pain and he made a sign of affirmation pointing to his breast, and immediately afterwards added : 'But, "Thy Will be done" always, and with love.' He was past considering what would, or would not

tire him. On the morning of Thursday, January 10th, telegrams were sent to his family whose proofs of affection had touched him very much. Both Jews and Christians arrived at once, and his niece, the Marquise de Broc, received on her forehead the last sign of the Cross traced by his dying hand.

“The supreme moment had come. . . . The arm-chair in which the venerable Father is supported by his faithful servant Joseph stands in the middle of the room. The Fathers of Sion are on one side of him, and opposite him is Mother Rose ready to anticipate every least wish. She has laid the Missionary’s Crucifix across the knees of the dying priest, and he never lifts his eyes from it save to give a last glance to each one present. Mother Marie Paul, Mother Benedicta, and Mother Marie Laure, are kneeling at his feet. Father Grandvaux is standing as he recites the prayers for the dying. All repeat them slowly with him, silent tears are falling, the beloved Father’s breast still gently rises and falls and his last breath escapes his lips so peacefully that the exact moment of departure is unseen. . . . He passed from death to life without a struggle; the end was more like transfiguration than death. A heavenly expression settled over the peaceful features and the bystanders beholding it could grieve no longer. They hesitated in their prayers, uncertain whether to continue the prayers for the agonising or to begin those for his eternal repose. Just then Monsieur Bieil,¹ a faithful friend to all at

¹ Director of the Seminary of St. Sulpice.

Sion, entered the room. After praying he rose and said the *Subvenite*, and looked round the little grief-stricken group. 'You should not mourn,' he said with emphasis; 'your hearts should be full of joy. Your Father has left you his spirit, the better part of himself. Guard it well to transmit it to others.'

"It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. . . . The Fathers put on him his priestly vestments and laid him on a bed, a Crucifix on his breast and a Rosary in his hands. The face of the holy priest was radiant and his lips were still smiling with his well-known expression. He looked exactly like the portraits of himself taken at the age of forty. . . . For three whole days before the funeral visitors of all ages, men and women, poured in to pray by the holy remains, and touch them with objects of piety.

"When the body was about to be put into the coffin all present were greatly surprised to see the room suddenly fill with little children, who had come, no one knew whence, to pray by the good Father. But it seemed only natural that these innocent little ones, so beloved by him, should have the last glimpse of him on earth. By a no less strange coincidence, when the coffin was going to be closed and a picture of Our Lady was sought for to be placed in it, the only one to be found was that of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Thus this Immaculate Heart which shone as a brilliant star over the morning of his days now reappeared to protect him on his way to the grave.

"The coffin was taken on the Sunday evening into

the Chapel of the Mother-House, where early next day, January 14th, Solemn High Mass was sung by Father Courtade, assisted by the other priests of Sion in the presence of all the Community and pupils.

"It had been decided that no strangers should join the family of Sion in this tribute of love but at nine o'clock the parlours were full. Crowds of relations, friends, and distinguished personages arrived at the Convent to have the honour of accompanying the body to the Church of *Notre Dame des Champs* where the Requiem was to take place. The pall was held by the Vicar-General, Mgr. d'Hulst, representing the Cardinal; Monsieur Bieil, Director of St. Sulpice, Father Charmetant, Director of the Oriental Schools Mission, and by the Abbé Mertian, sole survivor of the group of friends gathered together in Strasbourg when Father Théodore's sacerdotal career was just beginning. The Abbé Cognat, parish priest of *Notre Dame des Champs*, celebrated High Mass, after which Mgr. d'Hulst gave the Absolution. The Church was packed, and the funeral procession took nearly three-quarters of an hour to pass. The body was at once taken to Grandbourg, where more tributes of honour awaited it.

"Thirty years before the venerable Founder had chosen his last resting-place there, where in hope of a glorious resurrection he wished to sleep his last sleep, like a patriarch in the midst of his children."

"May he rest in peace!" wrote a holy Religious.¹

¹ Father Estrate, Superior of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart at Betharram.

"May he rest in peace who so loved peace, and knew so well how to preserve it in his soul, all through his long and fruitful existence! May he rest in peace who shrank from no sacrifice that he might bring peace to so many souls! May Our Lady of Victories receive him! May Our Lady of *Sant' Andrea delle Fratte* smile on him! And may Our Lady of Sion thank him!"

A telegram conveyed the news to Father Marie. The blow though expected and prepared for broke his heart, and his grief was only alleviated by the hope of being called soon to join his brother.

"My beloved brother died on January 10th at eighty-two years of age," he wrote to a benefactress, "after a life spent wholly in the service of God and His Church; we may believe that he has received the reward promised to the faithful servant. But to us who are still in the land of exile this separation means intense sorrow and the sense of an immense void. Pray and get prayers for the works of Sion and for the two poor brothers whom the Will of God must unite before long."¹

Letters and telegrams called him urgently to France but the weather was so tempestuous that he was unable to start. "We shall know later," he said, "why God did not permit my departure."

On May 1st he was seized with a violent attack of fever at *St. Jean in Montana*, and next day pneumonia set in with symptoms hopeless from the first.

"For some time," he said, "I have prayed to die at

¹ Letter of January 20th, 1884.

the same age as the Blessed Virgin. I was taken ill on May 1st, my seventieth birthday, which is a good sign; I asked of Our Lady to die at *St. Jean* and be buried there, so all my wishes are fulfilled."

Calm and smiling in the face of death, oblivious of self in his forethought for all those about him, Father Marie received the last Sacraments in perfect peace and simplicity, and then, dignified as ever in his performance of sacred functions, he blessed his children with a great sign of the Cross which seemed to reach from one end of the horizon to the other.

When he was told that four Jewish children had just entered St. Peter's School he exclaimed: "I thank Thee, my God! I have begotten them in my death agony, and God is my witness that I offer my life for the salvation of Israel."

Towards eight o'clock on the evening of the 6th a heavenly radiance lit up the features of the dying priest. He opened his eyes with a look of life and joy, an expression of surprise crossed his face followed by a radiant smile of happiness. This ecstasy lasted about three minutes, and then his eyelids closed, and his beautiful soul was with God.

He had often said, "When I am at my last hour, say one word, 'Mary,' and it will reach the depths of my heart."

Father Marie had already chosen and blessed his last resting-place in the little cemetery of *St. Jean*, for his humility forbade the idea of sleeping his last sleep in the crypt of the Chapel of Expiation. "What!" he

exclaimed one day, "is it for me to defile with my remains the sacred soil of the *Ecce Homo?*"

But facing the spot where first the *Magnificat* was heard, he felt the wings of Mercy overshadowing him.

The chief beauty of his grave consists in the austere simplicity of the design. There is no mausoleum nor monument of any kind, merely a simple slab of Syrian granite, slightly raised and bearing the arms of the Congregation carved in relief.

"On my tomb," the humble priest had also directed, "you will put only two words, '*Père Marie.*' The first will describe the sinner I was, the second the Blessed Virgin's mercy towards me."

His wishes have been respected. But above the tomb stands a statue of Our Lady Immaculate, with these words engraved on the pedestal :

O Marie, souvenez-vous de votre enfant qui est la douce et glorieuse conquête de votre amour! ("O Mary! remember thy child, the glorious trophy of thy love!")

On August 25th, 1885, the Superiors and all the members of the Fourth General Chapter of the Congregation assembled privately at Grandbourg for the blessing of the monument to Father Théodore's memory.

A large cross stands out in relief on the sarcophagus ; on either side an inscription perpetuates his teaching by recalling the words he most often commented upon—one is the invitation of the Master : *Si quis vult*

post me venire abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke ix. 23).

The other is the promise of Jesus Christ to all His disciples: *Omnis qui reliquerit domum, vel fratres, aut sorores aut patrem aut matrem propter nomen meum centuplum accipiet et vitam æternam possidebit*—"And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting" (Matt. xix. 29).

The *Pater dimitte illis* . . . ("Father, forgive them," etc.) is engraved on the Calvary which stands behind the monument, and is surmounted by the statues of Our Lady of Dolours and the Well-Beloved Disciple. In front, on the side which is seen at once on approaching the tomb, is the monogram of Sion carved in the stone, and above it the text which recalls the Mission of the Founder and of all his children: *Ite potius ad oves quæ perierunt domus Israel*.¹ Lower down are these simple words: *Notre Bòn Père, 1802-1884* ("Our good Father, 1802-1884"); and, last of all, the text of St. Paul which sums up the whole spirit of Sion:

*Super omnia caritatem habete
Quod est vinculum perfectionis.*²

¹ "Go first to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

² "But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection" (Col. iii. 14).

EPILOGUE

“IF God admits me into the Heavenly Sion,” said Father Théodore, “I shall never cease to love, strengthen, console and bless you.” The Founder kept his promise and the development of his double religious family has long testified to the efficacy of his prayers and the constancy of his paternal solicitude.

The Community of Nuns solemnly approved by the Church could face the future without fear, nothing remained to be done that had not already been provided for in their Constitutions. But the case was not the same for the Community of Priests which was still in process of formation at the time of Father Ratisbonne's death. It was a question whether the seed sown and cultivated so lovingly and perseveringly by the revered Founder would be scattered. But the Will of God was made manifest in subsequent events, which, without any human premeditation, brought about the fusion of the Priests of *Notre Dame de Sion* with the Institute of *Les Petits Clercs de Saint Sulpice*, founded at the end of the seventeenth century for recruiting young men for the priesthood. After three successive dispersions (in 1785, 1830, and 1871), after each of which it formed again, this Community was helped by *L'Œuvre du Cœur Miséricordieux de Jésus*,

also an association for training youths to the priesthood, founded by the Countess de Saissevæl, and principally supplied with subjects from another group known as *Le Cœur Immaculé de Marie*.

Unfortunately Father Courtade who was formally appointed Superior-General to the united Communities in 1886 died almost immediately afterwards. Father Ledrappier succeeded him and the fusion of the two Institutes was completed in 1893 by the taking of vows in the presence of Mgr. Richard who had become Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, Father Givelet being appointed Superior-General.

The new Superior came from the Diocese of Rheims, and had been relinquished most unwillingly to Paris by Mgr. Langénieux who wrote on the occasion: "When God speaks we must obey. In this case I felt especially bound to submit because I was one of the first pilgrims to Jerusalem, and was much attached to good Father Théodore; the prayers of his children will repay me for what one of my beloved sons is going to do for *Notre Dame de Sion*, and I have but to add my fervent wishes for the multiplication of Missionary priests destined to carry on their work."

For eighteen years Father Givelet ruled over the Society and during that time it did not escape those trials and persecutions which are the visible proof that a work is from God. In 1903 the Fathers and their pupils were affected for the second time by the laws of expulsion and obliged to seek shelter in Belgium; and a valiant son of Alsace, Father Eugène Schaffner,

led them into exile. The fateful 1st of August, 1914, found them at Louvain in full working order, when their dearest hopes were being fulfilled by a number of newly ordained priests. Thirteen of them were obliged to leave on the first day of mobilisation, and later, when their Communities in the East were dispersed they gave twenty more soldier priests and students, of whom six or seven were killed. The burning of the Martyr-city of Louvain, the imprisonment and miraculous deliverance of the Father Superior, and the dangers incurred by all the others are so many proofs that having once more deigned to bring the Work of the Fathers out of the furnace of tribulation, it is God's will it shall continue to exist.

"I can no longer say *I believe* in Providence," said Father Schaffner, after all these fearful occurrences, "because I have *seen* and *touched* proofs of God's Providence."¹

The Divine assistance was no less evident in the case of the Nuns of Sion. In 1886 Mother Marie Paul had been elected Superior-General and remained in office until her death on June 22nd, 1903,² during which time her charm and distinction, her kindly disposition, and peculiarly sympathetic nature were greatly appreciated throughout the Congregation.

Owing to her efforts eleven important foundations, among them the Convent in Rome, helped to spread

¹ Letter of April 22nd, 1887, to Mother Marie Paul Hibon.

² See "La Révérende Mère Marie Paul de Sion" (Beauchesne, 1917. Paris).

the Apostolate of Sion in all parts of the globe. She had been very efficiently helped in this work by Mother Marie Laure who succeeded her just as the fatal Laws against Religious Education began to ruin so many hopeful enterprises. This new Superior-General beneath a reserved exterior was endowed with great strength of character, and possessed a soul as singularly gifted for action as for contemplation. She was profoundly humble, and at the same time full of unbounded trust in God and gifted with a remarkable aptitude for business; although chronically afflicted with bad health, she never shrank from any sacrifice or abstained from taking any measures however painful which could further the cause of justice and the triumph of right. Thanks to her intelligence and persevering defence of the Congregation its work was recognised by the French Government as "Mixed," and allowed to remain in France.¹

Mother Marie Laure left this world on December 14th, 1910, before the Great War brought about other upheavals and changes. Twelve Convents of Sion were transformed into hospitals; three of these were bombarded, three others occupied by the Turks,

¹ During this time of religious persecution certain congregations were authorised to nurse the sick, etc., but none to teach exclusively. The Mother-House with the Novitiate, therefore, were saved, and the Convents of Sion abroad compensated in a certain measure for those which were not allowed to teach in France.—*Translator's note.*

and a fourth set on fire. The Church of the *Ecce Homo* had been committed to the charge of a few Nuns of different nationalities, and by a manifest intervention of Divine Providence they were fortunately able to thwart all the plots made to gain possession of it, for which, no less than for the protection of the Nuns who had to remain in enemy countries, the Congregation of Sion will never cease to bless and thank God. And as God had sent His Angel to deliver St. Peter from prison, so in one most special circumstance did He send His messenger to liberate those who had fallen into the hands of their enemies.

And now the banished Nuns of yesterday have returned to their posts. The Congregation of *Notre Dame de Sion* is represented in Palestine, Turkey, England, Roumania, Egypt, Tunis, Austria, and even in the little Republic of Costa Rica; and its Missionaries have also been welcomed in Belgium, in Italy, in Canada,¹ in the United States,² in Brazil, and in Australia. To every land where there are Schools of the Congregation, orphanages, workrooms, dispensaries, or Houses of Retreat, Sion has brought the love of God and of Religion.

The Chapel of Expiation built by Father Marie on the *Via Dolorosa* was raised to the rank of a Minor Basilica by a Brief of His Holiness Leo XIII., dated August 30th, 1902. Its consecration and the con-

¹ Canada : "Rosary Hall" and "Mayfair" at Saskatoon—Moose-Jaw and Prince Albert in Saskatchewan.

² United States : Marshall, Missouri, and Kansas City.

secration of the Altar on July 19th, 1903, and the imposing ceremony of its erection as a Basilica on January 20th, 1904, were the occasion of festivals such as the good Father would have rejoiced to see. Since then the Basilica has become the headquarters of a new work: the "Arch-Confraternity of Prayer for Israel,"¹ which unites the Faithful living in the world with the special work of Sion. This movement was due to the pious initiative of a distinguished ecclesiastic of Paris, and was placed in the same way as the "Arch-Confraternity of Christian Mothers" under the direction of the Priests of *Notre Dame de Sion*.

The first meeting of the "Association of Prayer" took place in the Chapel of the Mother-House on January 25th, 1905.

The Arch-Confraternity began by meeting once a month to hear Mass, during which all present repeated Our Saviour's prayer on the Cross, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*.

But energetic zelators soon started other centres of intercession and the Association grew so rapidly that in two years it numbered thirty-seven thousand members in France and other countries.

The Sovereign Pontiffs Leo XIII. and Pius X. have enriched it with precious Indulgences, and now all the world over in the home, the schoolroom, and the cloister, this prayer goes up to Heaven for Israel: *Dieu de Bonté, Père des Miséricordes, nous vous supplions par le Cœur Immaculé de Marie et par l'inter-*

¹ Decree of His Holiness Pius X., August 24th, 1909.

*cession des patriarches et des saints apôtres, de jeter un regard de compassion sur les restes d'Israël, afin qu'ils arrivent à la connaissance de notre unique Sauveur Jésus Christ, et qu'ils aient part aux grâces précieuses de la Redemption; Pater dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt.*¹

"God of all goodness, and Father of Mercies, we implore Thee, by the Immaculate Heart of Mary and by the intercession of the Patriarchs and the holy Apostles, to cast a look of compassion upon the People of Israel so that they may come to the knowledge of our only Saviour Jesus Christ and that they may share in the precious fruits of our Redemption: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Thus gradually the Mission of Reparation and Regeneration which God entrusted to the Fathers Ratisbonne is being developed and completed. "The works of God are like our Gothic cathedrals," said Father Théodore one day—"not one of them is completely finished. On earth there are nothing but beginnings, but in Heaven all will be consummated."

¹ Three hundred days' Indulgence.

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